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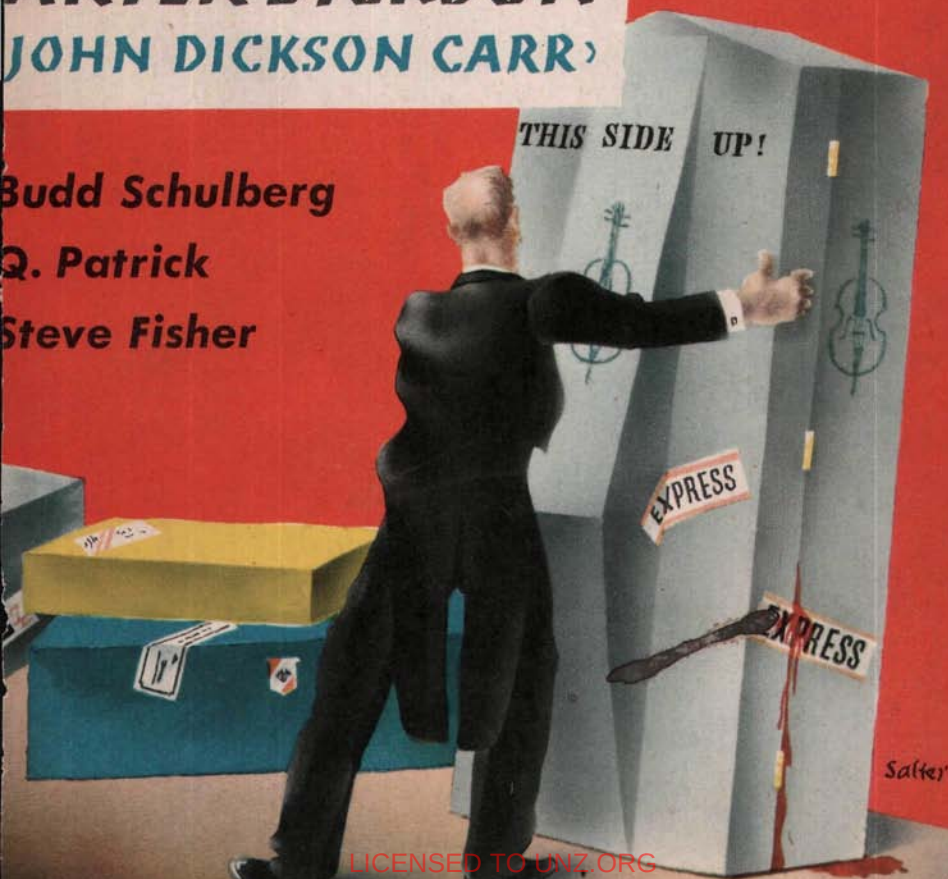
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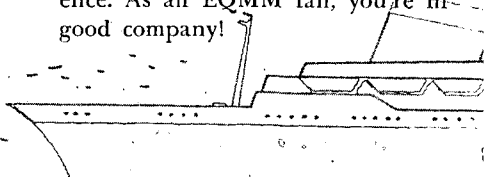
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**ELLERY QUEEN'S
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HAROLD NICOLSON

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THE MAN WHO EXPLAINED MIRACLES

by CARTER DICKSON (John Dickson Carr)

WHEN TOM LOCKWOOD FIRST saw her, she was running down the stairs in terror. Behind her stretched the great sweep of stairs up to the portico of St. Paul's; above, Paul's Dome almost shut out the gray spring sky. A pigeon fluttered its wings. But there were very few people to see what happened.

The girl glanced over her shoulder. She was still so badly frightened that Tom's first thought was instinctive: she might stumble and pitch headlong. So he ran towards her.

His next thought, born of his journalistic work, was the grotesqueness of this whole scene, as the bell

boomed out the stroke of four: a very pretty girl, with dark hair and wide-spaced gray eyes, fleeing in blind panic from the House of God.

Then she did stumble.

Tom caught her before she fell, and lifted her up gently by the elbows.

"Steady does it, you know," he said, and smiled down at her. "There's nothing to be afraid of, really."

Instantly she recoiled; then she saw his expression, and hesitated. Tom Lockwood's own mother could not have called him handsome. But he had such an engaging and easy-going expression, especially in his smile, that almost any woman would have

trusted him on sight — and would have been right.

"*Nothing* to be afraid of," he repeated.

"Isn't there?" the girl blurted out. "When last night, by some miracle no one can understand, they try to kill me? And now, just now, a voice speaks where no voice could have spoken? And tells me again I am going to die?"

Taxis hooted up Ludgate Hill. A rather sinister-looking policeman stood at the left-hand side of St. Paul's Churchyard. Tom had a topsy-turvy sense that he did not really hear the words she was speaking.

She spoke with passion, in a beautiful voice with — was it? — some very faint tinge accent. Her hair really was black and shining, worn in a long bob; the gray eyes, their pupils dilated with fear, had long black lashes. Tom was so conscious of her physical presence that he hastily let go her elbows.

"You don't believe me!" she cried. "Very well! I must go."

"No! Wait!"

The girl hesitated, looking at the pavement.

And Tom Lockwood was inspired almost to eloquence.

"You're alone," he said. "Oh, there may have been people with you in the Cathedral! But you're alone in yourself; you feel lost; you don't trust anybody. Will you trust a perfect stranger, if I tell you I only want to help you?"

To his intense embarrassment, tears came into her eyes.

"What you need —" he began. It was on the tip of his tongue to say "a couple of whiskies," but, in his present exalted mood, he decided this was unromantic. "Across the road," he said, "there's a tea shop of sorts. What you need is to drink tea and tell me your troubles. After all, hang it, I'm a reasonably respectable bloke! You see that policeman over there?"

"Yes?"

"*He* knows me," said Tom. "No, no, not because I'm an old lag just out of jail! As a matter of fact, I'm a crime reporter for the *Daily Record*. Here's my press-card."

"You are journalist?"

Her eyes flashed up; she pronounced the word almost as *journaliste*.

"Not where you are concerned. Please believe that! And you — are you by any chance French?"

"I am English," she retorted proudly, and drew herself up to her full height of five feet one. "Ah, bah! I am named Jenny. Jenny Holden. That is English enough, surely?"

"Of course. And I'm Tom Lockwood."

"But, you see," Jenny continued, "I have lived most of my life in France. When they brought me here for a visit, things seemed all funny but very nice, until —"

Jenny glanced back over her shoulder. Fear struck again, as though some terrifying presence lurked inside the Cathedral.

"Mr. Lockwood," she said, "of course I will go with you. And we need not be introduced by a policeman." Then her passionate voice rose. "But let us hurry, hurry, hurry!"

They dodged across through the skittish traffic to the tea shop at the corner of Paternoster Row. They passed the policeman in question, who seemed to fascinate Jenny. He was one of the Old Brigade: bulky and almost seven feet tall, just what any foreign visitor would expect to see.

Tom waved at him by way of greeting. The law saluted gravely but, when Jenny's head turned away, gave her companion a wink of such outrageous-knowingness that Tom's ears went red.

At the door of the tea shop, however, Tom hesitated and turned round.

"Stop a bit! Was there somebody with you at St. Paul's?"

"Yes, yes! My Aunt Hester and my Cousin Margot."

"They didn't frighten you?"

"No, of course not!" Jenny's lips became mutinous. "I do not like my Aunt Hester. She behaves like a duchess, with a lorgnette, and you can hear her talking all over a restaurant. You know what I mean?"

"Bitterly well."

"My Cousin Margot, she is young and I like her. But I wish to get away from them. Please!"

"Right," said Tom, opening the door. "In you go."

He allowed the door to close very briefly behind her so that she should not hear him when his voice carried clearly across to the policeman.

"Dawson! You haven't seen us. Understand?"

The law did. His wink was more portentous than ever.

In the tea shop, more properly a tea bar, two girls chattered and banged tins behind the counter. But the place was deserted, including the two booths at the back. When the newcomers sat opposite each other in the farther booth, over thick mugs of a beverage which was at least hot, Jenny's terror was decreasing. She accepted a cigarette, had it lighted for her, and hesitated. Then she burst out: "You see, it is so difficult to say! I don't wish you to think I am silly, or have fancies, or am off my head. That is what *they* think."

"They?"

"Aunt Hester. And others."

"Aunt Hester," said Tom, "shall be hung out on the clothes-line, preferably upside down, at the first opportunity. Meanwhile . . ."

He broke off, because Jenny bubbled with that laughter he came to know so well.

"You are nice!" she declared, like a magistrate imposing sentence. "Oh, how it is pleasant to meet people who make you laugh! Instead of—"

Jenny stopped, and disquiet settled on her again.

"It is silly," she insisted, "but I must say it. Can you explain miracles?"

"No. But I know a man who can. Did you ever hear of Sir Henry Merrivale?"

"Sir Henry Merrivale?"

"Yes."

"But he is awful!" cried Jenny. "He is fat and bald, and he swear and carry on and throw people out of windows."

"He is not, perhaps," Tom admitted, "quite the ladies' man he thinks he is. But he can explain miracles, Jenny. That's his purpose in life nowadays."

"You mean this?"

"Yes, I mean it."

"Then I had better explain from the beginning. My name —"

"I know your name," said Tom, looking at the table. "I am likely to remember it for a very long time."

There was a pause, while both of them hastily swallowed tea.

"Well!" said Jenny. "My father and mother went to live in France, at Cannes, before I was born. What with the war, and everything else, I had never been to England. My mother died during the war. My father died two years ago. My guardian is my father's old friend Général de Senneville. And I am now 25; in France, I am what you would call in England an old maid."

"Are you, now?" breathed Tom, almost with awe. "Oh, crikey! Have you ever seen yourself in a mirror?"

Jenny looked at him, and then went on very quickly.

"It was always my father's wish I should come to England. I should see

all the sights like any tourist: Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, St. Paul's —"

"Steady, now!"

"Yes, I am steady. Général de Senneville, my guardian, said this plan was a good one, and did much honor to everyone. So he sent me, in charge of my Aunt Hester, just before I got married."

"Before you —!" Tom blurted out, and then stopped.

Jenny's face went pink. Tom, in the act of lighting a cigarette for himself, held the match for so long that it burned his fingers. He cursed, dropped both match and cigarette into the mug of tea; then, to hide his expression, he shoved the mug of tea down on the floor under the seat.

"But what else could I do?" Jenny asked defensively. "It was arranged many years ago, between my father and the général. At twenty-five, and an old maid, surely that was best?"

The damage had been done. They could not look at each other's eyes.

"And who's the bloke you're marrying?" he asked casually.

"Armand de Senneville. The général's son."

"Do you love him?"

All Jenny's English feelings warred with her strict French upbringing.

"But you are not practical!" she exclaimed, the more vehemently because her feelings won every time. "An arranged marriage always turns out best, as the général says. It is understood that I do not love Armand, and Armand does not love me.

I marry him because — well! it must be done, at 25. He marries me because he wishes to obtain my dowry, which is very large.”

“Does he, by God!”

“How dare you!”

“These old French customs.” Tom folded his arms moodily. “You hear about ’em, you know they exist, but they’re still hard to believe. What about this Armand de Senneville? He has oily black hair, I suppose, and sidewhiskers down his cheeks?”

“You must not speak so of my fiancé, and you know it!”

“All right, all right!”

“He has dark hair, yes, but none of the rest of it. He is charming. Also, he is one of the best businessmen in France. ~~Armand is only thirty-five,~~ but already he owns three newspapers, two in Paris and one in Bordeaux.”

“Whereas I . . .”

“You said?”

“Nothing. He’s with you, I suppose?”

“No, no! He was bitterly opposed to this holiday. He could not get away from business; he speaks no English and does not like the English. He has to consent, because his father wishes it. But he warns Aunt Hester to keep a sharp eye on me, in case I should be silly and fall in love with some dull, stupid Englishman —”

Abruptly Jenny paused. Her own cigarette, unnoticed, was burning her fingers; she threw it on the floor.

Tom looked straight at her.

“Which you might do, mightn’t you?”

“No! Never! Besides, Aunt Hester and the de Sennevilles would never let me.”

While Stella and Dolly clattered tins and banged cups behind the counter of a prosaic tea bar, Tom Lockwood took a great and secret and mighty resolve. But he did not show it in his brisk tone.

“Now, then! Let’s get down to cases. What has frightened you so much?”

“Last night,” answered Jenny, “someone tried to kill me. Someone turned on the tap of the gas heater in my bedroom. It was impossible for this to be done, because all the doors and windows were locked on the inside. But it *was* done. Already I had a note saying I was going to die.”

Jenny’s eyes seemed to turn inwards.

“By good luck, they save me. But I don’t wish to speak of last night! This morning I am very — sick is not a nice word, is it? — no! I am ill. But Aunt Hester said this was nonsense, and it would revive me to go sight-seeing again. That is why we went to St. Paul’s. Do you know St. Paul’s?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t even been inside the place for a long time.”

“It happened,” said Jenny, “in the whispering gallery.”

Whispering gallery.

The eerie sibilance tapped against the nerves even in this commonplace tea bar, with traffic rushing outside.

“You climb up stairs,” said Jenny. “Spiral stairs. Stairs and stairs, until you are breathless and think you will

never get to the top. Then there is a tiny little door, and you go out into the gallery."

Then Tom remembered — how vividly this whispering gallery had impressed him. It was dizzily high up, just under the curve of the dome: circular, some two hundred feet across, and with only an iron railing to keep you from pitching down interminably to the acres of folding chairs on the ground floor below.

Noises struck in with brittle sharpness. Gray light filtered in on the tall marble statues of saints round the vast circle. It was solemn, and it was lonely. Only one verger, black-clad, stood guard there.

More than ever Tom was conscious of Jenny's presence, of her parted lips and quick breathing.

"I am not a coward," she insisted. "But I did not like this place. If you sit on the stone bench round the wall, and someone — even two hundred feet away — whispers near the wall, that whisper comes round in a soft little gurgly voice out of nowhere.

"Please attend to me!" Jenny added, with deep sincerity. "I was not well — I admit it. But I was not unbalanced either. Ever since I have received that first note saying I would die, I have watch everyone. I trust nobody — you were right. But I trust you. And, on my oath, this happened as I tell it.

"There were only five persons in all that dusky gallery. You could see. My Aunt Hester and my Cousin Margot. A fat red-faced countryman who is

come to see the sights with a packet of sandwiches and a thermos flask of tea. The verger, in a dark robe, who tells you about the gallery.

"That is all!

"First the verger showed us how the whispering gallery is worked. He leans against the wall to the left — you do not even have to be against the wall. He says something that we, on the right of the door, hardly hear at all. But it goes slipping and sliding and horrible round the dome. Something about 'This Cathedral, begun by Sir Christopher Wren —' and it jumps up in your ear from the other side.

"After that we separated, but only a little. I was nervous — yes, I admit that too! I sat down on the stone bench, all prim. Aunt Hester and Margot went to the railing round the open space, and looked over. Margot giggles and says, 'Mama, would it not be dreadful if I jumped over?'

"Meanwhile, the fat countryman has sat down fifty feet away from me. Calmly he opens the grease-proof paper and takes out a sandwich. He pours out tea from the thermos into the cup; he is taking a deep drink when the verger, who is outraged at sandwiches in St. Paul's, rushes towards him from ten feet away.

"Mr. Lockwood, I know what I saw! The countryman could not have spoken; he is really and truly gulping down tea. The verger could not have spoken — I could see his mouth — and anyway he is too far away from the wall. As for Aunt Hester or Mar-

got, that is nonsense! And, anyway, they are much too far away from the wall, and leaning over the railing.

"But someone spoke in my ear just then.

"It was in English, and horrible. It said: 'I failed the first time, Jennifer. But I shall not fail the second time.' And it gloated. *And there was nobody there!*"

Jenny paused.

With all the nervousness of the past days, there were shadows under her eyes, and she was more than pale. But a passion of appeal met Tom across the table.

"No, I did not say anything!" she told him. "If I had, Aunt Hester would only say I was imagining things. Just as she said I was imagining things last night, and must have turned on the gas-tap myself, because the room was all locked up inside.

"No, no, no! I jumped up and ran out. I ran down those stairs so fast no one could have caught me. I did not know where I was going or what I should do. If I prayed anything, I think I prayed to meet . . ."

"To meet whom?" prompted Tom.

"Well! To meet someone like you."

After saying this, defiantly, Jenny drank stone-cold tea.

"But what am I to do?" she demanded, with tears on her eyelashes. "I know Aunt Hester means me no harm — how could she? But I can't face her — I won't! Where am I to go?"

"I will tell you exactly," said Tom,

reaching across and taking her hands. "You are going with me to see old H.M., otherwise Sir Henry Merrivale, at an office which nowadays is humorously called The Ministry of Miracles. Afterwards —"

Bang!

The door of the tea bar flew open with a crash which half shattered its glass panel. Tom, sitting with his back to the door, first craned round and then leaped to his feet.

Outside the door, but not yet looking into the tea bar, stood an imperious and stately lady who was addressing someone beyond her.

"I am well acquainted, constable," she was saying, "with Sir Richard Tringham, the Commissioner of Police. Your deliberate falsehoods will not help you when I report you to him personally. You have denied you saw any young lady run down the steps of the Cathedral. You have denied she met a young man in sports coat and gray flannels. Finally, you have denied they went into any of the shops or other disgusting places along here. Is this so, or is it not?"

"S right, marm," stolidly answered Police-Constable Dawson.

Whereupon Aunt Hester made her entrance like Lady Macbeth.

"I am Mrs. Hester Harpenden," she announced to the walls at large. "And I have *distinctly* different information from a newspaper seller. I have —"

Here she saw Tom, who was standing in the middle of the floor.

"That's the man," she said.

Up to this time Stella (rather buck-toothed) and Dolly (distinctly pretty) had remained stupefied and silent behind the counter. Now both of them gave tongue.

"Disgusting place, eh?" cried Dolly. "I like that!"

"Busted the door, officer," screamed Stella. "Busted the door, that's what she done!"

"Busted the door, did she?" repeated Police-Constable Dawson, in a sinister voice. "Oh, ah, I see." And he reached for his notebook.

Meanwhile, as Aunt Hester calmly advanced, Tom glanced back towards Jenny.

But Jenny was not there. She was gone; she was not anywhere in the place.

The sharp pang this gave him was not his only feeling. For an instant he believed he had strayed from St. Paul's churchyard into a world of monsters and twilight, where anything might happen; and, in a sense, he was not far wrong.

"Young man," Aunt Hester asked quietly, "where is my niece?"

"Do you see her here, madam?"

"No. But that does not mean . . . A back entrance! Ah, yes! Where is the back entrance here?"

"Just a moment," said Tom, stepping in front of her. "Have you a warrant to search these premises?"

"Do I need a warrant to find my own niece?"

"Yes, yer do and all!" screamed Stella. "Eiither yer orders tea and cakes, which is wot we're 'ere for, or

out yer go straightaway. 'S right, officer?"

"'S right, miss," agreed the law.

Aunt Hester was not fooled for a moment.

Seen close at hand, she was — or seemed — less formidable than bitter and bony, with a high-bridged nose and washed-out blue eyes, as though she had suffered some disappointment in youth and never forgotten it. Tom could tell her clothes were fashionable, as Jenny's were fashionable, without knowing why he knew.

"Then you are all against me, it seems," she smiled. "Well! This will indeed make a budget of news for my friend the Commissioner of Police!"

"By the way," Tom said casually, "*who* did you say is the Commissioner of Police?"

"But, Sir Richard Tringham, of course!"

"Oh, put a sock in it," said Tom. "Sir Richard Tringham has been dead for seven years. The present Commissioner is Colonel Thomas Lockwood. And I ought to know — he's my father."

"Cor!" whispered Dolly.

"'S right, marm," agreed Police-Constable Dawson.

Aunt Hester, not in the least impressed, merely raised her shoulders.

"Ah, well!" she smiled. "If police-officers are bribed to tell untruths, then I had better be off."

Majestically she strolled towards the front of the shop. With a gesture of contempt she opened her purse, took out a couple of pound-notes,

and murmured something about paying for the glass door as she tossed the notes towards Stella:

Then, when she was within a step of the door, she whirled round and screamed at Tom like a harpy.

"Where is my niece?"

And Tom's temper crashed over too, like the glass platform of cakes which Dolly had been nervously handling.

"In a place where you'll never find her," he yelled back, only hoping he was telling the truth.

"If I prefer charges of abduction—"

"When she goes away of her own free will? Don't talk rot! And shall I tell you something else, Mrs. Harpenden?"

"By all means. If you can."

"That girl is of age," said Tom, advancing towards her. "Even under French law, her guardian no longer has any authority over her. But she doesn't seem to know that. She's being pushed and bullied and hounded into a marriage she doesn't want, by a lot of ghouls who are only interested in her money. And I tell you straight: I mean to stop it."

"Ah, I see. *You* want her money."

The steamy room was dead quiet, with fragments of shattered glass and colored cakes all over the counter and floor. Both Stella and Dolly had cowered back.

"Yes, that hurt," said Tom. "You knew it would hurt. All right: if you want open war, it's war from this time on. Agreed?"

"Oh, agreed," replied Aunt Hester, her head high. "And I have a feeling, dear Mr. Lockwood, that you are not going to win. *Good day.*"

With all the honors she marched out, closed the door, and turned right toward Paternoster Row. They had time to see a brown-haired girl of seventeen or eighteen, with slanting eyes and a mischievous look, run after her. It could only have been Jenny's cousin Margot.

Tom, exasperated to see those two pound-notes lying on the counter, flung down another two to match them.

"That's for the smashed container and the cakes," he said.

"But, reolly, now!" protested Dolly, in an ultra-refined voice. "This is too much money. And is the Commissioner of Police reolly your father?"

"S right, miss," said Police-Constable Dawson, and stolidly marched out.

"Ducks, ducks, ducks!" cried Stella, addressing Tom. Being not very pretty, she was more inclined to sympathize with his bedevilments. "You needn't worry about your young lady. 'Course there's another way out of 'ere!"

"There is?"

"'Course there is. At the back, and turn sideways. I saw your young lady run out as soon as we heard the old witch's voice outside. Either the young lady's still hiding in the passage past the washroom, or she's gorn out into Paternoster Row."

"My deepest thanks!" said Tom.

He turned and plunged towards the back — only to be stopped short by another figure materializing in this extraordinary tea shop.

This was a shortish, wiry man with his light-brown hair cropped close to the head after a prevailing American fashion. He was perhaps in his middle thirties; he wore loose-fitting clothes, and his tie could be seen at sixty paces in any crowd.

"Now hold it, brother!" he urged. "Don't go busting out of there or you'll louse up the whole deal."

Tom blinked at him.

"The old lady," continued the stranger, evidently referring to Aunt Hester, "left her car — it would be a limousine — parked in Paternoster Row. It's not there now. She'll be screaming for the cops again, and you'll run smack into her. Besides, the kid is safe now."

"The kid? You mean Jenny? Where is she?"

Something like a self-satisfied smile crept across the newcomer's face.

"I told the chauffeur," he said, "to drive her straight to a guy named Sir Henry Merrivale, at an address he seemed to know. Sit down for a minute, until the old dame stops yelling about her stolen car."

Tom Lockwood extended his hand.

"Maybe you won't want to shake hands," retorted the newcomer almost evilly, and put his hands behind his back, "when you hear what I am."

There was about him something distinctly foreign, in a way that no

American is ever foreign. Though Tom could not analyze it, his companion enlightened him.

"Get it?" he asked. "I'm a Canadian. Lamoreux's the name — Steve Lamoreux. I was born in Montreal; I can speak French as well as I speak English. In Paris they say my accent is terrible; but they understand me. I'm a newsman for *L'Oeil*. Been in France for six months. Don't you get it *now*?"

"Well! I . . ."

Steve Lamoreux's shrewd brown eyes, in the hard yet sympathetic face, were almost glaring at him. And Lamoreux spoke bitterly.

"I'm the stooge," he said. "I'm the tail. In other words, I'm Armand de Senneville's hired spy to keep out of the way, never let the girl see me, but make sure she doesn't meet any boy friends. If she does . . ."

Tom, aware that both Stella and Dolly were listening with all their ears raised his voice.

"Could we have two more teas, please?" he called. Then, to Lamoreux: "Into the booth here. And keep your voice low."

They sat down opposite each other. "What the hell?" said Lamoreux. "I'm only human. That girl's too innocent; I won't see her pushed around. What's more, I can't take this miracle stuff any longer — not for a hundred bucks a week or anything else. Do you realize that, but for a thousand-to-one chance, she'd be lying dead at the mortuary this very minute?"

It was a cold and ugly statement, just as the great bell of St. Paul's boomed out the hour of five.

"She didn't tell you how bad it was last night, did she?" asked Lamoreux.

"Not the details, no."

"No, you bet she didn't! The girl has guts — I'll say that for her."

"But how do you know she didn't tell me?"

"Because I overheard every word you two said in here! Look!" persisted Lamoreux, tapping a finger into his palm. "When they started out today, in their grand limousine, I followed in a taxi. Aunt Hester knows me, and knows all about me. Her husband, Uncle Fred, and young Margot — well, they've seen me once, here in England. I couldn't help that, but they'd never seen me before, and it doesn't matter. Jenny doesn't, and mustn't, even suspect."

"Those were my orders from young de Senneville. He didn't dare send a Frenchman as a tail — it might be too conspicuous. But Jenny's seen this map of mine more than once at the newspaper office; if she spotted me, it might shake her faith in good old Armand."

"Quiet!" Tom warned softly.

It was Dolly who appeared, demurely, setting down two mugs of tea already sugared. Though she seemed inclined to linger, Lamoreux's glance sent her away miffed.

"Armand de Senneville," Tom said between his teeth. "What I should like to do to that . . . !"

"Easy, now, brother! You're talking about my boss."

"He may not be your boss much longer. You may get a better one."

"How's that? Say it again."

"Never mind; get on with the story."

"Well! Aunt Hester and Margot and Jenny had the car parked in Paternoster Row. They told the chauffeur to wait there. I ditched my taxi, and sat in the car with the chauffeur. We could see the whole front of St. Paul's. We knew we could see 'em come out."

"And then?"

"You know what happened. About thirty-five minutes later, she comes tearing down the steps. You grab her. I think to myself, 'Steve, this is your job; this is where the balloon goes up.' Over you come to this place. I sneak in the back way, and I'm practically against a matchboard partition behind you. When I heard about a voice speaking in the whispering gallery, when no voice could have spoken, I damn near fainted. And there's another thing."

"Yes?"

Uneasily Lamoreux drew out a packet of Yellow French cigarettes. He struck an old-fashioned sulphur match; he brooded while holding the match until the sulphur burned away. Then, still lost in thought, he lit the cigarette and flicked away the match.

"When I first got a gander at you, see —" Lamoreux stopped.

"Well? What is it?"

"I thought it was an ordinary pick-up. Then, when I heard you two talking, I thought you were a right guy. And I still think so."

They glared at each other, because no man pays a compliment to another's face. Then, after an embarrassed pause:

"That's why I stuck my neck out. I could see Aunt Hester charging for this joint before either of you two did. I knew Jenny would duck for a way out. And *she* knew the car was parked just beside here. So I rushed out and told Pearson — that's the chauffeur — to drive her straight to this guy H.M. I'd heard of the old — the old gentleman; and I knew *he* was all right."

Lamoreux pointed his cigarette at Tom with grimacing emphasis.

"But get this!" he added. "I'm no guardian angel or *pieux chevalier*. The hell with that stuff. Somebody in dead earnest tried to bump off that kid. Somebody'll try again, and I want no part of it. All I'd like to know, for the sweet suffering Moses's sake, is who's doing this and why?"

Lamoreux's voice rose up piercingly until he remembered they were in public.

Then it sank to a whisper. They sat and thought and worried.

"Armand de Senneville —" Tom began.

"Look," the other said wearily. "You've got that guy on the brain. De Senneville wants to marry her for her money. What good is it to him if she's knocked off here in England?"

"Yes. I suppose that's true."

"But take it the other way round!" argued Lamoreux. "Take that gang in their country house near Hampton Court. I don't doubt Aunt Hester, at least, will get a large slice of dough when this marriage comes off. She's been in France dozens of times — she's cheering for matrimony like nobody's business. All right! Then what motive has she, or any of 'em, to kill Jenny and lose the money themselves?"

Steve Lamoreux at last took a sip of tea, which so disgusted him he did not speak for thirty seconds.

"It's nuts!" he said. "It makes no sense however you look at it."

"On the contrary," said Tom, "it's got to make sense! That's why you and I are going to see H.M. as fast as a taxi can take us."

"But I can't go there!"

"Why not?"

"Because Jenny's there, and she might spot me. All the same, if you want to reach me at any time before seven this evening, call me up at this number. If you want me any time after that, here's the number of my hotel near their house."

With a little gold pencil he scribbled two telephone numbers on a sheet torn from a notebook, and handed it to Tom.

"Locked rooms!" said Lamoreux. "Whispering voices! No motives! Brother, I'd give my last dime to go with you! What's the old — what's Sir Henry going to say about this one?"

In little more than twenty minutes, Tom Lockwood found out.

"Y'see," said Sir Henry Merrivale, with surprising meekness, "I'm sort of in trouble with the government."

"How do you mean?" asked Tom.

"Well, sort of," said H.M.

The old sinner, all sixteen stone of him, sat behind the desk in the familiar office, twiddling his thumbs over his corporation. His shell-rimmed spectacles were pulled down on his broad nose, and light from the windows behind him glistened on his bald head. On his face was a look of such martyrdom that it had won Jenny's complete sympathy and only enraged Tom.

"Well, y'see," H.M. pursued, "I've been abroad for maybe two or three years . . ."

"Ah, yes!" said Tom. "It was in New York, wasn't it, that you wrecked the subway at Grand Central Station and nabbed the right murderer on the wrong evidence?"

"Oh, son! I dunno what you're talkin' about," said H.M., giving him an austere look.

"And in Tangier, I think, you blew up a ship and let the real criminal escape just because you happened to like him?"

"Y'see how they treat me?" H.M. demanded, his powerful voice rising as he addressed Jenny. "They've got no respect for me, not a bit."

"Poor man!" Jenny said warmly.

"Oh, Lord," moaned Tom. Like most people, he could never resist the

temptation to make fun of the great man; and then, to his astonishment, he found women sympathizing with H.M.'s most outrageous exploits.

"But why," he persisted, "are you in trouble with the government?"

"It seems I spent more money than I should have, or burn me, than I can account for. It also seems — would you believe it? — I shouldn't have had banking accounts in New York, Paris, Tangier, and Milan."

"You didn't know, of course, you weren't allowed to have those banking accounts?"

"Me?"

"Never mind," said Tom, smiting his forehead. "What happened to you?"

"Oh, Lord love a duck!" said H.M.

"When I got back to England, you'd have thought I was Guy Fawkes and the Cato Street conspirators all rolled into one. They hoicked me up on the carpet before an old friend of mine. I won't say who this louse is, except to tell you he's the Attorney-General."

"No," said Tom. "By all means don't breathe a word."

"Henry," he says to me, 'I've got you over a barrel.'"

"Did the Attorney-General actually use those words?"

"Well . . . now!" said the great man, making a broad gesture and giving Tom a withering look. "I'm tellin' you the gist of it, that's all. 'Henry,' he says, 'on the evidence I have here I could have you fined a hundred thousand pounds or stuck in jail for practically a century.' " Here

H.M. broke off and appealed to Jenny. "Was this just?" he demanded.

"Of course it wasn't!" cried Jenny.

"'However,' he says, 'you pay up in full, with a fine, and we'll forget it. *Provided*,' he says —"

"Provided what?"

"I'm to go back to my own office here, d'ye see? It used to be part of the War Office, before they messed everything about in the war. And I'm to be in charge of Central Office Eight of the Metropolitan Police."

"Please," said Jenny in her soft voice, "but what is Central Office Eight?"

"It's me," H.M. replied simply. "Anybody who calls it The Ministry of Miracles is going to get a thick ear. They had enough fun, curse 'em, with the late Ministry of Information. If anything rummy turns up at Scotland Yard — any loony case that doesn't make sense — they chuck it at my head."

Here H.M.'s expression changed.

"Y'know," he said, "strictly among ourselves, I don't mind so much. I'm gettin' old and mellow now —"

"I'll bet you are," Tom muttered sardonically under his breath.

"— and it's comfortable here, sort of. Well!" said H.M., sitting up briskly and rubbing his hands together. "The old man's in business again. You got any miracles you want explained?"

"Have we!" said Tom. "Jenny! Haven't you told him?"

He himself had just arrived, hurrying in to find H.M. pouring out his

woes and tribulations. In the old dusty office, high above Whitehall, Tom and Jenny looked at each other.

That office, as H.M. had said, was comfortable. Above the fireplace still hung the Satanic portrait of Fouché, Minister of Police under Napoleon. There was a very impressive-looking safe, inscribed IMPORTANT STATE DOCUMENTS: *DO NOT TOUCH!* — but containing only a bottle of whiskey. The office had seen many strange things happen — it would see many more.

"I told him about what happened in the whispering gallery, yes!" said Jenny. "But I do not even know how I have come here at all! I hated to leave you in the tea shop, but Aunt Hester was so furious I could only run. Then, at the car, the chauffeur says that some Canadian gentleman —"

"That's all right. I can explain later."

"Some Canadian gentleman, who has been sitting with him in the car when we went into St. Paul's, told him to drive me straight to this H.M. of yours. You have said so too, so I go." Jenny's brow wrinkled. "And I was so, so wrong about your H.M.!"

"Oh?" enquired Tom.

"Yes, yes! He does not swear or carry on or throw people out of windows. He is what you call a poppet."

"Hem!" said the great man modestly.

"Frankly," said Tom, eyeing the stuffed owl across the desk, "I shouldn't call it a well-chosen word to apply to him. You'll find out.

However! When I'd chucked out Aunt Hester, with the aid of two counter-girls and a friendly cop, I thought I'd never get here. I was afraid some infernal thing or other had happened to you, and I might never see you again."

"You may see me," said Jenny, and stretched out her hands, "when-ever you wish."

"*Oi!*" interposed a thunderous voice.

The alleged poppet was now glaring at them with a malignancy which raised Jenny's hair.

"There's not goin' to be any canoodling in this office, is there?" he demanded. "All my life I've tripped over young people with no idea except to canoodle. ~~Now listen to me, my dolly.~~"

His big voice altered and sharpened. The whole atmosphere of the office changed as his small eyes narrowed behind the spectacles. He might be irascible, unreasonable, and childish, but he was still the Old Maestro — and you trifled with him at your own risk.

So H.M. spoke gently.

"You understand, my dolly, what I've already told you? That neither Général de Senneville nor Armand de Senneville has any hold over you? And neither have Aunt Hester and Company? That you're a perfectly free woman?"

Jenny pressed her hands against her cheeks.

"Yes," she said. "I suppose I always knew that, really. But . . ."

"But what?"

"People are so *determined*. They don't yield a bit. And it's always gone on like that. So you say to yourself, 'Oh, what's the use?'"

"Yes, I know," nodded H.M. "But that's what causes so much unhappiness in this world, especially for gals. Well, what's your feeling now? Do you want to fight 'em and beat 'em hands down?"

"Yes!"

"Do you still want to go on staying at your Aunt Hester's house? What's-its-name? Near Hampton Court?"

"It's called Broadacres, on the river. Tomorrow, they tell me, they will save the best of the sights for last ~~—they say they will take me to see Hampton Court Palace in the afternoon.~~"

"They say that, hey?" H.M. muttered thoughtfully. Something flickered behind his glasses and was gone. "Never mind! Do you still want to stay at your Aunt Hester's?"

"No. But what else can I do, except return to Paris?"

"Well," glowered H.M. scratching the back of his neck, "I've got a house, and a wife, and two daughters, and two good-for-nothing sons-in-law I've had to support for eighteen years. So I expect you'd better move in too."

"You mean this?" cried Jenny, and sprang to her feet. "You would really want me?" she asked incredulously.

"Bah," said H.M.

"Sir H.M.! How to thank you I do not know. . . !"

"Shut up," said the great man austere.

Jenny sat down again.

"Then there's your clothes," he mused. "That's a very fetchin' outfit you've got on now, and I expect you brought a whole trunkful?"

"Yes, my clothes! I forget!"

"Don't worry," said H.M. with a suggestion of ghoulish mirth. "I'll send a police-officer to fetch 'em. If that doesn't put the breeze up Aunt Hester to a howlin' gale, I don't know her kind. But understand this, my dolly!"

Again his tone sharpened and struck.

"Aunt Hester'll hit back. Don't think she won't. Also, you're likely to have the whole de Senneville tribe here and on your neck." H.M. blinked at Tom. "I say, son. Shall you and I handle 'em?"

"With pleasure!" said Tom. "And definitely without gloves."

"In the meantime," H.M. went on, looking very hard at Jenny, "I've heard about this rummy business in the whispering gallery, yes. But there's something else you've got to tell me, and very clearly, before I can help you at all."

"Just a minute!" interrupted Tom.

"Oh, for the love of Esau," howled H.M. "What's wrong *now*?"

"A voice spoke where no voice could possibly have spoken," said Tom. "Do you believe that?"

"Certainly."

"Then how was it done?"

"Oh, my son!" groaned H.M., with a pitying glance. "You don't mean to say that trick fooled you?"

"Do you know how it was done?"

"Sure I do."

"Then what's the explanation?"

"I'm not goin' to tell you."

Tom got up and did a little dance round his chair. H.M. sternly ordered him back into it.

"I'm not goin' to tell you," he went on with dignity, "because very shortly I'm goin' to *show* you. You can see with your own eyes. That's fair enough, hey?"

Whereupon his own eyes narrowed as he looked at Jenny.

"Stop a bit! We don't want Aunt Hester to pick up the trail too soon. You said you came here in a car, with a chauffeur. Is the car still waiting? Or did you send it back?"

"I have sent it back," retorted Jenny. "But I *know* I can trust Pearson — he is the chauffeur. I have told him to say I have gone off on my own, alone, to have tea at Lyons'."

"Which Lyons?"

Jenny's gray eyes opened wide.

"I am English, I keep telling you!" she insisted. "But how can I know much of England if I am never here? Is there more than one Lyons'? The only London restaurants of which I have heard are Lyons and the Caprice and the Ivy."

"Those three grand old restaurants!" exclaimed Tom, and resisted an impulse to put his arms round her.

"H.M., Aunt Hester will think Jenny

is giving her the raspberry, which is exactly what you'd do yourself."

"Uh-huh. That'll do. Now then: about this first miracle — of a gas-tap being turned on in a locked room."

When H.M. produced his ancient black pipe, and began to load it with tobacco looking (and tasting) like the steel wool used on kitchen sinks, Tom knew he must brace himself for more trouble.

"My dolly," said H.M., "a lot of bits and pieces have come flyin' out of your story. I can *see* this aunt of yours. I can see her daughter, Margot, who's eighteen years old and up to mischief. I can see your Uncle Fred, who's tall and red-faced and looks like a retired major. I can see this white-Georgian-house-with-long-windows, set back from the river. But burn me if I can see the details!"

"How do you mean?"

"For instance. D'ye usually sleep with the windows closed, to say nothin' of being locked? Is that an old French custom?"

"No, no, of course not!"

"Well, then?"

"It is the details," said Jenny, biting her lip, "I have not wished to talk about. They are — bad. I feel the gas strangle me again. But never mind! First, Aunt Hester put me into a bedroom on the ground floor."

"Why?"

"And why not?" Jenny exclaimed reasonably. "It is a very nice room. But it has two windows stretching to the ground. Aunt Hester is frightened of burglars, and asks me please to keep

the windows tight-locked. By the time I am ready for bed, I am so scared that I put both bolts on the door as well — on the inside. You see, it was at dinner I received the note."

"What note?"

"It was a little note, folded up in my napkin at the table. I thought —"

"Yes, my dolly?"

"At first," Jenny explained, peeping sideways at Tom, "I thought it was from a young man I met at a tea party they gave. He has made what you call the eyes at me. So —"

"*That's* an old French custom, if you like," Tom said politely. "You thought the note was from him, and you didn't want anybody else to know?"

Jenny turned on him flaming.

"I do not like this young man at the tea party! I do not wish to see him again! But if he has written a note to me, can I give the poor man away?"

"No. Sorry, Jenny. Shouldn't have said that."

"But it is not from him at all, or anything like that. I read it under the table. It was only one line, in a handwriting I never saw before. It said, '*You will die tonight, Jennifer.*'"

Jenny moistened her lips. H.M. had lighted the pipe, and an oily cloud of smoke crept over the desk.

"At first I thought it was a joke. What else can I think? Then I looked at the rest of them, all so normal, with the candles burning on the dinner table. And I know I am alone. I am a stranger, even if I am in my own country — and I am frightened!

"I did not even dare ask if the note was a joke. So I hid it, and afterwards I lost it. At 11 o'clock, when it was time to go to bed . . ."

"Yes, my dolly? Go on!"

"I sleep badly," said Jenny. "Always I have. No matter how late I go to bed, I always wake up at 5 or 5:30 in the morning. There was a custom I had in France, first when I lived with my parents and afterwards at the house of Général de Senneville. A maid brought me a cup of chocolate at 6 in the morning."

"When Aunt Hester asked if she could do anything more, I asked if I might have the chocolate, or else tea, at that time. I had been there several days, but it was the first time I venture to ask. Aunt Hester lifts her eyebrows and says, 'Do you think, Jennifer my dear, that is quite fair to the servants?'"

"I said no, no, please to forget it. But Margot, who has green eyes and is nice, she is always up before six, she says, and will be glad to bring me a cup of tea then. Very well! I go to my room. I turn on the light. I fasten the bolts both at the top and bottom of the door. Then I turn round. And one of the windows, which I have left locked, is wide open."

Jenny paused.

H.M., wrapped in his cloud of nauseous smoke, was as expressionless as an idol.

"I rush across," continued Jenny, her voice rising. "I close and lock the window again. Then I think, 'Suppose someone is hiding in the room?' But

I must not be stupid and rouse the whole house. And so — well! I search the room myself. Nobody is hiding there. I think perhaps some servant has opened the window to air the room, and I feel better."

"It is a warm night — very warm, they tell me, for an English spring. So I do not need to turn on the gas heater in the fireplace when I undress. I close the window curtains almost shut. But I smoke a cigarette or two, you can bet, before I have the nerve to turn out the light. But I do turn out the light, finally. And soon I am asleep. Then —"

"Hold on!" interposed H.M. softly, and took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Y-yes?"

"What time did you turn in? Do you remember?"

"Yes. I see my wrist watch. It is ten minutes past twelve."

"Did any of this family know beforehand about your habit of takin' chocolate at six in the morning?"

"N-no, I do not think so. How could they? I —"

Again Jenny was trembling; and, worst sign of all, she was again glancing over her shoulder. Tom got up and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Hadn't we better stop this, H.M.?" he demanded.

"We can't stop it, son, and you know we can't. That gal really *was* in a locked room. It's practically impossible to tamper with bolts when they're at the top and bottom of the door. Those Georgian window-locks are dead sure for safety. Unless I can

get a hint about this, the old man's dished."

"I am very well, thank you," said Jenny. "I can go on, if you wish."

"Well?" said H.M., putting the pipe back in his mouth.

"First there was a dream. It was horrible, but I don't remember it now. Then I knew I was awake, and being strangled so I could not breathe. This part is hard to describe. But — when you are dying, or even losing consciousness, you can still hear sounds clearly even though you can barely see?"

"Yes, my dolly. That's right."

"I could tell it was just growing daylight, no more. But somebody was pounding on the outside of the door. And I hear Margot's voice crying my name. I tried to scream back, but there is no breath, and already — this is not pretty — I had been sick."

"Next, which is all confused, I heard a man's voice outside with Margot. It was an American voice I have never heard before. It said, 'What's wrong, kid? Isn't she okay?' Margot screams that the room is full of gas, and can't he smell it from under the door? He says, 'You won't break down that door. Where's the window?'"

"Still I am just conscious. I can hear everything, though it must be like being hanged. I hear them run away, and someone else join them. Then I see — all blurry, because my eyes have nearly gone — I see someone's fist, wrapped in a coat, punch through the glass of the far window."

"This is my Uncle Fred, who has been roused too. He unlocks the window and pushes it all the way up. Someone runs to turn off the gas-tap at the heater. I think this is the American. I cannot see, but I hear him say a wicked word, and say, 'So-and-so, but it's turned full on!' He turns it off. Margot rushes towards me, spilling a tea tray on the carpet. That is all I remember, until the doctor is there."

Jenny lifted her hands, and let them fall on the handbag in her lap. As the oily smoke from H.M.'s pipe reached her at last, she began to cough.

H.M. put down the pipe and knocked it out.

"The doctor, hey?" he repeated. "And what did the doctor say?"

"It was not the doctor who spoke to me. It was Aunt Hester. She said, 'This is not very considerate of you, Jennifer. To try to kill yourself because you are not happy about your future husband.'"

Tom Lockwood's grip tightened on her shoulders. "Your Aunt Hester said that?"

"Yes! And it is not true! But they ask how anyone could have tried to kill me, when the room is all locked up inside?"

"Anything else, Jenny?"

"I say, 'Where is the American?' They say, 'What American?' and claim he is a delusion of mine. They stand round my bed, all big-eyed — Aunt Hester and Cousin Margot and even poor old Uncle Fred — and look down at me. They say it is a mercy

the doctor is their family doctor, and will not report this to the police. Dear God, do you wonder I am afraid of them?"

"H.M.!" Tom said sharply, after a pause.

"Well?"

"You may have been wondering about this mysterious American . . ."

"Frankly, son, I have. I don't see where he fits in."

"He isn't an American," said Tom, "but he isn't a delusion either. That gang made a bad slip when they claimed he was. I'll tell you all about him at the proper time. Meanwhile, do you see any clue at all?"

H.M., who had been sitting with his eyes closed and a very mulish look on his face, now opened his eyes slowly and inspected Jenny.

"My dolly," he said, "I've got only one more question to ask now. But I want you to be awful careful how you answer it. You could hear all these voices clearly when you were nearly unconscious. You could hear the pounding on the door, the footsteps running away, and the rest of it. *Did you hear any other sound besides that?*"

"What — what kind of sound?"

"Any kind!"

"No, I don't think so."

"You're sure of that, now?"

"Yes, positive!"

"Oh, Lord love a duck," observed Sir Henry Merrivale, with his mouth falling open. "So *that's* how the locked room was worked!"

"How?" shouted Tom.

"I'm the old man," said H.M., tapping himself impressively on the chest. "You let me deal with this in my own way. I'm goin' into action at once."

H.M. reached for the telephone at his elbow. He dialed for an outside exchange, and then dialed the number. During a long pause, while they could hear the ringing tone go on interminably, Tom Lockwood listened to an air-vent which hummed and hummed in the ceiling, and at intervals he studied H.M.'s face, now as malignant as the Evil One's.

The ringing tone broke off. There ensued, from H.M.'s side, the following weird and wonderful conversation.

"Looky here, my wench. I want to speak to Sam. . . . Oh, yes, I can! This is the old man. You just tell him I squared it when he was givin' a beautiful party for sixteen beautiful gals without any clothes on, and the silly-ass coppers broke in. Yes, the old man! . . ."

A gratified note crept into H.M.'s big voice.

"That you, Sam? How are you . . . ? Never better, Sam! There's a question I want to ask you. . . . Thank'ee Sam. How many vents are working now? . . ."

Tom Lockwood looked up wildly at the air-ventilator humming and whacking above his head. He looked at an equally bewildered Jenny.

"Only three? You're sure of that? Right, Sam. Gimme their names and descriptions. Yes, I said descriptions!

Uh-huh. . . . No, the first one's no good. Try the second. . . . Lord love a duck, that sounds like the one we want! But try the third, just for luck. . . . No, he's no good either. It's Charley Johnson. Gimme the address. It's nearly six o'clock — he's bound to be at home now. . . . Thanks a million, Sam. And try to keep to one woman next time, hey? — All right, all right!"

Ringling off with the handsome air of one who has made all things clear, Sir Henry Merrivale spun the dial once again.

"Sergeant? I want a squad car, to hold three people and a driver, as quick as kiss-your-hand. Two minutes? Outside the Horse Guards Avenue entrance? Right!"

Lumbering to his feet, H.M. took down from a rack an ancient Panama hat and thrust it on. This hat, which had a band of startling colors and whose brim was turned down all round like a bowl, gave an even more sinister look to the great man's unmentionable face.

"Sir!" protested Tom. "What in the name of sense is all this business of air-vents, and how can it help us?"

"You wanted a miracle explained, didn't you?" demanded the great man. "All right. Are you comin' with me, or not?"

Within the promised two minutes, and in the police car — Jenny and Tom sitting in the back seat, H.M. piled in front with the chauffeur — they whipped out of Horse Guards Avenue, turned left, and shot down

Whitehall. H.M. who himself has never driven a car without landing through a shop window or against a lamp-post, made caustic comments about driving skill to a red-eared police driver.

Far beyond the towers of Westminster, behind its stately terraces and flats, lies a region of dingy, almost unknown, streets. The red-brick houses in these streets, by a show of brass knobs and letter-slots, try to keep up a brave pretense that they are private homes and not lodging houses.

But gritty winds make discarded newspapers dance along their gutters; children scream; there is an overriding clatter of dustbins. Before one such dingy house, which did look like a private home and really was, the car stopped.

"Come on, you two," grunted H.M.

He impelled Jenny and Tom out of the car, and up a flight of stone steps to the front door. There he jabbed his finger at the bell.

"For the last time," said the desperate Tom, "will you tell what an air-vent —" H.M. pulled down the brim of his hat even harder.

"Who said anything about an air-vent?" he howled. "I didn't. I said 'vent.' That's the theatrical and professional term for a ventriloquist. — Didn't you ever hear a ventriloquist?"

Jenny's hands flew to her open mouth.

"According to your story," pur-

sued H.M., "there were only four persons in the whispering gallery with you. This time we can acquit both your Aunt Hester and your Cousin Margot — they were leaning over the railing, much too far away from the wall.

"We can acquit the outraged verger in charge of the place. But who else was there? According to you, a fat and red-faced countryman — a little too thoroughly dressed up as a countryman, wasn't he? — who carried a packet of sandwiches and a thermos flask.

"When you heard the words, he was sitting against the walls and plainly drinking tea. All right, my fatheads! Who's the only man alive who can make his dummy speak clearly while he himself is walloping down a full glass of water? You know the answer.

"I rang up the king of all impresarios and found out the names and descriptions of the only three vents working in London. This Charley Johnson won't know much about the case. Somebody handed him a fiver to play what he thought, and probably still thinks, was a joke. But *he*, when we see him, can tell us who bribed him to —"

The front door was hurled open.

There is no other word for it — the door crashed against the wall and all but rebounded.

In the doorway there stood, swaying slightly, that same fat man Jenny recognized from the whispering gallery. His face was now less profes-

sionally red; he was bald, and wore no wig. Instead of his countryman's clothes, he was wrapped round in a somewhat grubby dressing gown of black and orange stripes. In one hand he held a whiskey-and-soda, in the other a half-eaten sandwich.

But what held them was the expression of his face. His eyes were so horribly wide open that a ring of white showed all the way round the iris.

"*Look out, you two!*" snapped H.M.

Tom dragged Jenny back just in time.

Charles Johnson, making a bubbling noise, took one step forward. Then he pitched headlong down the stone steps, turning over twice before he lay face down on the pavement.

The smashed glass, the half-eaten sandwich, had flown wide and fallen. Because of the man's tiger-striped dressing gown, it was a moment or two before any of them saw the black handle of the knife driven into his back just under the left shoulder-blade.

Nobody moved until the police driver sprang out of the car. It did not need the driver's nod, looking up, to tell them Johnson was dead.

Children's roller skates crashed past on the opposite side of the street, amid shouting. A few windows banged up; a few women's heads were thrust out. That was all.

H.M.'s face was white.

"Easy, my dolly," he said, putting his hand on Jenny's arm and speaking

with surprising gentleness. "Is that the man you saw at the whispering gallery?"

The shock was too great. Jenny could only nod.

"Then that means," said H.M., "this is no straight business of frightening a gal out of her wits. It means there's somebody who's dead-determined, crazy-mad, to get what he or she wants. Somebody got here before us and shut Johnson's mouth. Murder with a knife is all in the day's work. And that means . . ."

He brooded so long, ruffling his fingers at his temples, that Tom could not remain quiet.

"H.M.!" he said. "What is it?"

"It means there's been a slight change of plans," he answered.

"How?"

"You, my dolly," said H.M., "aren't going to spend the night at my house after all. If you've got the nerve, you're goin' straight back to spend the night at Aunt Hester's."

A golden sky was becoming tinged with purple over the thin Tudor chimneys of Hampton Court Palace.

Sir Henry Merrivale, in his most maddening mood, sat on an upended wheelbarrow, in one of the few remaining Tudor quadrangles: of dark red brick, with its white stone lions uprearing from the walls beside sly little windows. H.M. was again smoking his black pipe, and looked up at Tom without favor.

"Well," he asked querulously, "where's the whole party *now*?"

"As far as I know, they're still tramping through miles and miles of picture galleries."

"But looky here, son!" protested the great man. "According to my watch, and the notices posted up, this place should have been closed for a long time. Shouldn't they all have been flung out of here hours ago?"

"Yes. But it seems Uncle Fred has a lot of influence with the director or the curator or whatever they call him. They're being taken over the whole show at their leisure, particularly since Jenny's keen to see the maze; and that's a long way from here."

"Maze, hey?" H.M. repeated thoughtfully.

"Now listen to me!" roared Tom, assuming an oratorical posture. "Since a few minutes past six yesterday afternoon, when you got rid of us all, until half an hour ago, when I set eyes on your ugly dial again, you've asked questions by the bucket. But you won't answer a single question yourself. Why?"

"Cause I'm the old man."

"And you think that's a good enough reason?"

"Sure it is. I say, son. How is . . . I mean, how is . . . ?"

Tom regarded him bitterly.

"How is Jenny taking this?" he asked. "What the devil do you expect, after that asinine order she was to go back to Aunt Hester's last night? She's taking it badly, of course! But she won't let any of 'em see for a minute she's afraid."

Here the old sinner had at least the grace to look discomfited.

"Well . . . now!" he growled. "I had my reasons, hadn't I? Burn me," and H.M.'s voice rose up passionately, "people are always sayin', 'What an old cloth-head he is; stick him upside down in the dustbin.' Then they see what I mean. And they yell, 'Why, Henry; pull him out and dust him off; we should never have guessed it.' And of course they wouldn't have guessed it, the star-gazin' goops! Only —"

H.M.'s eloquence was interrupted only by a back-wash taste from his own black pipe. Then he simply sat and looked evil.

"All right, all right!" he said. "What did you do last night?"

"Steve Lamoreux and I stood guard outside Jenny's windows all night —"

"Stop a bit, son. Does the gal know who Lamoreux is?"

"She doesn't know he's Armand de Senneville's spy, naturally! And she can't meet him. But, for all practical purposes, he *isn't* a spy. He won't stand for violence —"

"Uh-huh. I know. I talked to him in my office today. You were sayin'?"

"Well, while the rest of 'em were at dinner, Steve and I sneaked into her bedroom and dismantled the gas heater . . ."

Tom paused in even more exasperation. H.M., with a silent and ghoulis mirth, was rocking in ecstasy.

"Oh, son! You didn't think the murderer would try *that* simple little trick again?"

"Simple little trick?"

"Easy as shellin' peas."

"Will you acknowledge to me," demanded Tom, after a hard-breathing pause, "that the door of the room really was tightly bolted on the inside and couldn't have been tampered with?"

"Sure."

"Will you acknowledge that both windows were securely locked on the inside and that they weren't tampered with in any way?"

"Agreed without a struggle."

"Will you finally acknowledge that, with no funny business about outside gas meters or the like, somebody — *somebody actually in that room* — turned on the gas-tap?"

"That's right, son."

"Then how in hell did the murderer get in and out of that room?"

"I'm not goin' to tell you. Now wait!" said H.M., and pointed with the stem of his pipe. "Yesterday you raved and danced about the 'miracle' of the ventriloquist, didn't you? But that was easy. And this is just as easy, maybe easier, if you think about it. I want you to think about it. Meanwhile, you'd better think of something and somebody you've rather neglected."

"Oh? Who's that?"

"Armand de Senneville himself. You hated him from instinct and from jealousy. But maybe your instincts were right. I had him investigated today."

"Well?"

"He's tough, son," H.M. said som-

berly. "He's tougher than you think. He's an outstanding businessman, a first-class journalist, a mechanical expert, and he was liaison officer with the Yanks for four years during the war. Finally, he's as conceited as the devil; he swears, in private, there's *nothing* he ever wanted that he hasn't got."

"But Armand de Senneville's in Paris!"

"He doesn't have to be here, don't you see?" H.M. asked patiently. "Now listen. You, and the gal Jenny, and even Steve Lamoreux, have all thought there was a whole conspiracy of the Harpenden family — Uncle Fred, young Margot, and Aunt Hester — against Jenny Holden."

"And isn't there?"

"No! Coincidence has mixed you up. There's only *one*, one of those three, who has any knowledge of it. One of them, bribed by Armand de Senneville, would pay any price to have Jenny Holden frightened out of her wits. I give you three: which one?"

It was growing darker in the ancient quadrangle. Tom paced up and down the paving stones, his footfalls stirring back ghostly echoes from the walls.

H.M. knocked out his pipe and replaced it.

"Burn me," he said in a worried voice, "where's that whole family now? You were supposed to be keepin' track of 'em, weren't you?"

"I couldn't! Aunt Hester knows me too well, from that bang-up row in the tea shop! But Steve is trailing

'em, and giving me signals from windows whenever he can."

"But they can't stay in there forever! It'll be pitch dark! I'd give my ears to know where they've gone!"

It was unnecessary to sacrifice H.M.'s ears.

From under the archway to a second quadrangle the sound of "*S-s-t!*" hissed at them in a way which made H.M. leap up from the overturned wheelbarrow.

Steve Lamoreux approached as warily as a red Indian. Tom, not without difficulty, had persuaded him to put on a dark suit and an inconspicuous necktie. But his short brown hair stood up as wirily as ever, and he infuriated H.M. by addressing the great man as Pop.

"They're outside," he said, "at the back of the joint. They're going along that broad path, at the back of the palace, that runs a long way to the left between the palace and the gardens. They've got the oldest guide here, who's deaf and practically blind. — And for the love of Pete, Pop, get a wiggle on or they'll close the inner gates and *we'll* be locked in!"

H.M., not without much ruffling of his dignity, was hauled and impelled through the archway, across another quadrangle, and then through a very long archway at whose end they could see the last gleam of daylight.

They stopped at the outer edge of the arch. Just ahead lay the immense gardens, their straight-ruled lines of

flower beds draining of color in twilight. Peering round the edge of the arch to the left, Tom saw the very broad, sanded path beside ancient walls.

Five persons, their backs to the conspirators in the archway, strolled along this path about a hundred yards ahead. Though it was too dark to discern faces at that distance, Tom knew who they were as they walked abreast.

First, on the extreme left, doddered an old guide in uniform. Next, marching briskly, strode Aunt Hester. Jenny walked nervously between the giggling Margot, who danced with short steps, and the firm military stride of Uncle Fred on the extreme right.

"All right," whispered Tom. "What do we do now?"

"I know what we *could* do," said Lamoreux.

"You do, hey?" sneered H.M.

"Yes! They can't recognize us in this light. If we just strolled after 'em, three abreast but keeping back, they'd take us for another privileged tourist party like themselves. That is, if somebody could do a little spiel like a guide."

The role of guide caught Sir Henry Merrivale's fancy at once.

"Hem!" he said, tapping himself on the chest. "Me."

Lamoreux looked doubtful.

"Okay, Pop, you're the boss. But are you sure you know enough about the history of this joint?"

"Me?" said the outraged H.M.

"The palace of Hampton Court," he bellowed, "begun by Cardinal Wolsey in the year 1515, was in 1526 pinched from this worthy prelate by that howlin' old ram King Henry the Eighth, whose wives I shall now proceed to —"

"Pop! Quiet!"

"Am I a guide," H.M. asked loftily, "or ain't I?"

"You are," snapped Tom. "And if the balloon goes up, it goes up. Anyway, I can see Jenny. They can't hurt her now. Let's go."

Out they marched, trying to tread softly, with Lamoreux on the inner side, Tom in the middle, and H.M. on the outer side.

It was quiet, so intense that they could hear the footsteps of these far ahead of them as well as their own. Peace lay in the hollow of a warm spring night, with the fragrance of grass and trees. You would never have guessed that death was walking with them along the broad white path — and moving closer at every pace.

Tom Lockwood did not know this, of course. But he sensed danger-fangs everywhere. He kept his eyes fixed on Jenny as though she might disappear, and his nerves were twitching like a landed fish.

So he quite literally jumped as a mighty voice smote through his thoughts.

"On our right," it thundered, "we got the famous Hampton Court gardens, forty-four acres of elegant spinach, first laid out by King William the Third and completed in 1734."

"For God's sake be careful," whispered Tom. "William the Third died in 1702."

H.M. swung round, fists on hips.

"And d'ye think I don't know that?" he bellowed. "I didn't say the old sour-puss finished 'em, did I? I just said he laid 'em out — which is what I'm goin' to do to you, young man, if you don't shut up and stop interruptin' my lecture."

"Pop! The soft pedal! Give it the old soft pedal! Holy cats, they'll hear you as far as Thames Ditton!"

But, whatever devilment H.M. had meditated — and Tom knew he had planned it in advance — the damage was done. Five persons, mere shapes in the twilight, turned round and looked back.

Out from the group, head high, marched Aunt Hester. She strode along the full distance that separated them, and looked straight at H.M.

"You, I fancy," she said coolly, "must be the man Merrivale?"

"On our left," bellowed H.M., "we see the celebrated tennis court. The game of tennis, originally played with a wooden ball, was designed with the laudable purpose of knockin' somebody's eye out — which it generally did. One famous match —"

"Answer me, please!" said Aunt Hester. "On whose authority, may I ask, are you in these grounds after official visiting hours?"

H.M. gave her a wicked look.

"On Sir Hugh Rossiter's," he said. "The same as yours. Want to ring him and find out?"

Since H.M. knew everybody, this might possibly be true. Aunt Hester did not dare risk the challenge. Besides, she was more interested in someone else.

"One of you, I believe," she stated crisply, "I have already met. Indeed, Mr. Lockwood, I wish to have a word with you."

"Fire away," said Tom.

"Ever since you abducted my niece yesterday, and afterwards returned her in — I *hope* — a condition suitable to a bride, poor Jennifer has been talking nonsense which I propose to stamp out here and now."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Absurdly enough, the girl believes she is in love with you."

"Is she, by God!" exclaimed Tom.

Whereupon he completely lost his head. Raising his voice, he shouted clearly and loudly through the twilight.

"Jenny!" he called. "*Jenny! Do you love me?*"

Jenny spun round in the broad white path.

"Yes!" she shouted back.

"*Will you marry me?*"

"Yes!"

Dead silence.

"Well . . . now!" observed Sir Henry Merrivale, with much complacency. "Since that's all settled and finished —"

"Oh, cripes!" breathed Steve Lamoëux, in a voice Tom had never heard him use. "If that's how people propose to each other in England, maybe it's true you're kind of casual."

Do you just get married on the telephone, or what?"

But Aunt Hester was not amused. The paint stood out against her pale face; she was alert, smiling — and dangerous.

"How interesting!" she laughed. "It surely will interest her dear guardian and," Aunt Hester's eyes slid sideways, "the *fiancé* to whom she is pledged. Tell me, Mr. Lockwood, what is your yearly income?"

Tom stared at the ground.

"Well! I didn't want to . . ."

"Come, Mr. Lockwood!" said Aunt Hester, with honeyed sweetness. "You are a reporter on the *Record*, we know. Just what *is* your yearly income?"

"Tell her, son," growled H. M.

"All right!" said Tom, raising his head. "When death duties are subtracted, it'll be about twelve thousand pounds a year."

"*Twelve — thou —*"

"I didn't earn it," snapped Tom. "My mother left it to me. I've published just one unsuccessful novel. When I walked up Ludgate Hill yesterday, I was thinking about chucking my job and trying full-time writing. That's what I'll do, when Jenny marries me. It's why I told you, Steve, you might get a better boss; you can have my job, and they'll hand it to you on a plate. But I've never given two hoots about Jenny's money, and I'd rather prefer it if she didn't have a penny to her name."

"This is the most fantastic —" Aunt Hester was beginning, when she stopped dead.

H.M. slowly extended his neck, and gave her such a look as could not have been matched by Satan himself.

"Madam," he said, "you've got no business with us. Sling your hook."

"I absolutely refuse —"

H.M. extended his finger until it almost touched Aunt Hester's nose.

"Madam," he said, "are you goin' to hop it? Or do you prefer to find yourself, sittin' down, in the middle of King William's spinach?"

Aunt Hester hopped it. Before that glare, which would have caused the Angels of Light themselves to retire to prepared positions, she could have done nothing else.

She ran hard towards the group ahead, and appeared to be talking rapidly. The whole group faced round and began hurrying, at a faster pace, in their original direction. Jenny seemed violently to object, but Margo gripped her arm and hastened her on.

Tom Lockwood, a powerfully built young man, was all for charging forward and starting a fight at once. His companions held him back.

"Easy, son!" said H.M. "Not just yet, I tell you! We've got 'em in sight. They can't get away."

"Pop," declared Lamoreux, whose face was pale and pinched, "you're a so-and-so. You're a so-and-so and a this-and-that. You deliberately yelled all that guff about spinach and tennis balls, just so the old dame would come tearing back here. Why did you do it?"

"Well . . . now!" said H.M. with

a modest look. "I rather wanted to know, d'y'e see, if some person would meet some other person. Am I making myself clear?"

"No. You're not."

"Never mind, son," soothed H.M. "I haven't been so much worried about that gal as about another person. Besides, I repeat, they can't get away. We've got 'em in sight."

Lamoreux stopped in his tracks.

"Oh, no, we haven't!" he said in a high voice. "Where are they now? They've disappeared!"

It was true.

Once past the gardens and the long line of the palace, the road was closed in by tall trees, dusky and spectral against a windless night, with an occasional bench on either side. Five persons had vanished from the road.

"H.M.," said Tom, seizing his companion's arm, "you seem to be the expert on Hampton Court. Where does this road lead?"

"Steady, son! It leads to one of the main entrances — the Lion Gate. But, if you turn to the left before you reach the gate, you'll soon get to the open space where they've got the maze —"

"The maze!" said Tom, and every nameless fear boiled up inside him. "Run, you blighters! Run!"

That H.M. himself did run, despite his large corporation and his dislike of any pedestrian exercise, can only be stated as a fact. Lifting his chin so as to cleave the air, he belted along that road as fast as his younger companions.

Some hundred and twenty yards farther on, they saw the dim gleam of a light past an avenue of trees branching to the left. Into this they flew abreast, found themselves in a large open space, and stopped.

For the first time they heard the wheezing, rusty voice of the old guide.

"Now, miss," he was pleading, "you don't really want to go into the maze, do you? 'Tisn't very difficult, not what we like to pretend it is. But that's in the daytime. You don't want to go in at night, miss."

"But I do!" Jenny insisted firmly. "All my life I've been reading about the Hampton Court maze, and I'll die if I don't explore it. Won't you lend me your electric torch?"

In the clearing, a hut or small pavilion had been set well back, evidently used as somebody's living quarters; on a pole against the side of the hut burned a sickly electric bulb.

The famous maze was set well out from the hut. It was roughly oval in shape, a little higher than a man's head, of green hedge raggedly trimmed. Illumined in bright green and dead shadow by the sickly light, it loomed up less as a place of comedy than as a secret, malicious trap.

The entrance must be at the far side, because the entire party was assembled there. Slant-eyed Margot was jumping up and down with joy.

"May I go in too, Mama?" she shrilled. "May I go?"

"No, you may not," said Aunt Hester sharply. "Afterwards, perhaps, if dear Jennifer —"

"Lot of nonsense, *I* call it," grumbled Uncle Fred from under his gray military mustache.

"*Please* may I have the electric torch?" said Jenny in a voice no man could resist.

"Ah, well," mumbled the guide. "'Ere's the torch. I s'pose I can always climb up on top of the stepladder by the entrance, and give you directions if you get lost. Be nippy, now."

"I will! I will!"

"Jenny!" called Tom. "Jenny, wait! I'm going with you!"

His words did not carry to her. Faintly he heard the creak of a small gate, and the brushing of Jenny's body against the narrow sides of the maze.

Tom sprang forward, instantly Sir Henry Merrivale locked both his arms from behind, and held him back.

"No, son," said H.M., in so soft and deadly a voice that Tom was startled. "You're not goin' into that maze."

"Why not?"

"Whose life," asked H.M., glancing round him; "d'ye think I've been worried about, as much or more than the little gal's herself? *Yours*."

"Are you crazy?"

"No. But you're not goin' inside that maze."

Tom, with one sudden heave and jerk, tore loose even from H.M.'s powerful grip.

"I'm sorry, sir. But that's where I'm going, and neither you nor anybody else is going to stop me."

He ran across the sanded space, and round the side to the entrance. He saw the startled face of Uncle Fred, who was swinging a heavy yellow cane. He saw Aunt Hester, with rigid mouth. He saw the pretty, mischievous face of Margot, who was slipping away in another direction.

The guide had already shakily mounted to the top of the stepladder beside the entrance. Tom swung open the little gate, twisted sideways as he plunged into the maze, and attempted to run.

It was impossible.

The hedge-walls were so narrow that tendrils stung his face. Though it was not pitch-dark, just enough light filtered down from the dim bulb outside to distort the eyesight and turn dark shapes into illusions. He might run slap into a hedge-wall at any second, and just saved himself from doing so.

Gently, now!

Stopping at a turn, Tom felt down on his left and found the thin wall, of hard and curved wire, built a little below waist height. In this maze, he remembered it had been said, you must always turn to the left. He did so, and presently turned left again.

That was when he saw, deeper inside these thinnish walls, the firefly glimmer of Jenny's torch. It vanished again — but it was there.

"Jenny!" he called. "Wait for me! It's Tom!"

"Tom! Darling!" Her voice slipped through the walls rather than above them. "Where are you?"

"I don't know. Where are you?"

"Very near the center of the maze, I think."

"Then stop where you are! Wait until I catch up with you!"

"Oh, no!" Jenny retorted demurely. "I'll get to the center and turn off the torch. Then you can find me and tell me how much you love me."

"Jenny, wait!"

But the firefly glimmer danced away. He could hear her brushing and hurrying on. In a moment or two there was a cry of pleasure, as evidently she found the center of the maze. The light of her torch went out.

Tom moved forward, more slowly and carefully. The electric bulb at the hut was now so distant and so dim that it gave scarcely any light. Tom didn't know where he was. Walls loomed up and closed round him. It wasn't pleasant, being shut into a twisting maze where . . .

Then he stopped, listening.

Somebody was following him stealthily through the maze.

Somebody, not much lighter than his own weight, was stalking him — with what intent? Tom ran forward and stopped. The footsteps behind him ran forward and stopped. Tom ran again. But he was not left in doubt long.

A closer footfall, a looming of a shape in near-darkness, made him glance over his shoulder. He saw the upsurge of someone's silhouette. A distant gleam flashed on the blade of the knife as if lifted high — and struck.

All that saved Tom from being stabbed in the back, as Johnson the ventriloquist had been stabbed, was the dim light and the attacker's misjudgment. The blade of the knife ripped through the cloth of the coat over Tom's shoulder. The attacker, plunging forward so hard that he collided with Tom, sent his victim sprawling one way and drove his own head and shoulders, grotesquely, straight into the hedge on the other side.

Somebody screamed one word, nothing more.

With a crackling of branches, the attacker wrenched out his left arm and then withdrew his head. Before he could disengage his knife-hand, Tom landed a vicious right-hander that opened his assailant's cheekbone and drew first blood.

Then they faced each other, two dim shapes, between the narrow walls.

There were no Queensbury Rules here. Neither man was a boxer. But both were enraged and both meant murder.

The attacker held his knife blade out, to leap forward and rip up. Just as he lunged, Tom kicked him in the groin. The attacker, in intense agony, began to double up; his knife fell and tinkled. Tom hit him again.

The attacker, straightening up, flew in with both fists. Tom hit him twice, left and right, in the belly. Then he put all his strength into a right cross to the man's jaw — which, if it had landed, would have broken Tom's hand.

But it did not land on the jaw. Instead it landed, with just as murderous effect, in the soft flesh under the man's left ear. The attacker, brain paralyzed and legs suddenly gone to water, reeled backwards and fell.

"Now where the devil," Tom was thinking, "did we get so much space?"

Then he realized they had been fighting very near the entrance to the center of the maze. For the first time he heard voices, and bodies thrashing about in the maze.

Behind him loomed up the blaze of an electric torch. Above it showed the malignant countenance of Sir Henry Merrivale. Next, cowering away in one side of the maze's center, Jenny switched on her own torch.

Both beams converged on the man who lay on his back in the center of the maze. His eyes were closed; he breathed stertorously; sluggish blood flowed from a cut in his cheek.

Jenny's face grew so white, and she turned her head away so abruptly, that Tom thought she was going to be sick.

But his own feelings were swallowed up in incredulity.

"This is impossible!" he said, pointing to the man on the ground. "That's Steve Lamoreux, the reporter!"

"Oh, no, it's not," said Sir Henry Merrivale. "*That's Armand de Senneville himself.*"

"Explanations?" demanded H.M., in a tone of dismal surprise. "You don't mean to tell me you *need* explanations?"

Jenny and Tom, both seated beside the desk in H.M.'s office at the end of the following day, instantly and vehemently said they did need explanations.

H.M. sighed.

"Y'know, my dolly," he said, "you ought to have seen through your *fiancé*, Armand de Senneville, sooner than you did. He tried to prevent your trip to England. He couldn't prevent it—his father's word was law. But he knew how much you'd been repressed and kept under the thumb in France. He knew, as he casually warned Aunt Hester, you'd probably fall bang for the first presentable, easy-going Englishman who made you laugh and didn't think correct behavior was everything in life. Which is what you did."

"I did not!" Jenny cried indignantly. "I have fall bang for Tom, yes. But that is a different thing!"

Tom hastily intervened in order to evade the devastating question, "How is it different?"

"Then de Senneville," he said, "had only to crop his hair, have it dyed brown, wear very loud clothes, and pose as a French Canadian reporter from one of his own papers?"

"But Armand," insisted Jenny, "speaks no English!"

"No?" said H.M. "That's what he told you, my dolly. But as I explained to Tom here, the bloke was attached for four years to the American Army as a liaison officer. So surely he could speak English. In fact, his ear was perfect; his American was perfect.

But he had to play the part of a French Canadian to explain how he spoke both languages."

"And yet," exclaimed Jenny, her eyes clouding, "I still do not understand this Armand! If he wished to keep men away from me, why did he not say he spoke English and go with the whole party of us?"

"You don't understand that, my dolly? Though it's the key to his whole character?"

"No! Why is it the key?"

"Because he was too proud," said H.M., "and he was far too conceited. He wouldn't demean himself in public by showin' he was concerned. He wouldn't admit that any man alive could take you away from the great Armand."

"Listen, my dolly, he never wanted to kill *you*! Neither did Aunt Hester. All they wanted to do was scare you so much that you'd run straight back to France. Don't you remember what you said yourself, in this office? I asked, 'Do you still want to stay at your Aunt Hester's?' And you cried out, 'No, but what else can I do except return to Paris?' — Got it now?"

"Then," Jenny blurted out, "just to get my dowry, this Armand has . . ."

"Oh, he wanted your money," said H.M. somberly. "But, towards the end, I don't think that was all. That murderous fight in the maze wasn't done altogether for money. I expect, in his own queer way, he was a little bit in love with you."

Again, since Jenny's eyes were

clouding worse than ever, Tom intervened.

"But the locked room!" he said. "Where the gas-tap was turned on even while windows and door were both locked on the inside!"

"Well . . . now," H.M. sighed wearily. "I'd better tell you about it, because that locked room told me the whole ruddy truth before I even knew who was behind it."

"On the famous Night of Terrors," he added, pointing at Jenny, "you found, in your napkin at dinner, a note readin', 'You will die tonight, Jennifer.' Eh?"

"But who wrote the note?" interrupted Tom.

"Aunt Hester wrote it," snapped

H.M. "There's never been much mystery about her. Her words and actions were too plain. She was the dominating character of her family, the only one, as I more than hinted, whom de Senneville bribed and prompted."

"After dinner," H.M. continued, still pointing at Jenny, "you went to your room at a little past eleven o'clock. One of the long windows, which you'd left closed, was now wide open. Correct?"

"Yes," said Jenny, and shuddered.

"You closed and locked the window again. You didn't need to touch or go near the gas fire. At shortly past twelve you went to bed, and soon fell asleep. The next thing you knew, Margot was bangin' on the door at six o'clock. A mysterious 'American' voice is asking what's wrong. They ran round to the window, pickin' up

Uncle Fred on the way. Uncle Fred smashes the window. The mysterious 'American,' whom you can't see because you're too far gone, rushes over to the gas fire. He says, 'So-and-so, but it's turned full on!' And, apparently, he turns it off. Correct again?"

"Yes, yes."

"Not to me it isn't," said H.M., shaking his head. "Whoever this mysterious American was, he was the joker behind the trick. He told a flat lie. That gas *couldn't* have been turned full on."

"Why not?"

"Because you'd have been dead," H.M. said simply. "Let's suppose somebody, in the middle of the night, sneaks in and turns on the gas full-strength. Never mind what time it was. Let's even say it was as late, as impossibly late, as five o'clock in the morning. But there's no person in the world, breathing full-strength gas in an unventilated room, who can breathe it for an hour and still live. So I asked you a question to prove it."

"What question?"

"Oh, my dolly! You could describe every small noise you heard even when you were only half conscious. But you *didn't* hear any noise of a gas fire turned on full, which would have roared like a tornado. That's all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jenny, caught up with a jolt. "Then . . .?"

"Yes! Just before you retired to your room, Armand de Senneville — alias Steve Lamoreux — sneaked in and turned on the gas heater a tiny thread — only a tiny thread, not

noticeable at all. He went out, leavin' the window wide open for good ventilation.

"You came in and closed the window. Well! What does happen, in very big rooms like that one, with such a tiny leak of gas? You can't hear it, you can't even smell it, for well over an hour. The bed is too far away. And it's caused tragedy before this. Meanwhile, for nearly six hours, the room is very slowly fillin' up with gas. When they found you, you were in just the condition I'd have expected.

"That's pretty much everything, my dolly. Armand de Senneville was lurkin' close outside, of course. You bet he was! He'd calculated his times, as he always does, but he was damned near too late to bust in himself, as he intended.

"He *had* to meet Margot — he couldn't help it. But that gal's a silly kind of wench, so excited she never wondered what he was doin' there. Uncle Fred barely noticed him. Later, it was easy for Aunt Hester to look 'em straight in the eye and tell 'em both they'd been dreaming. She was the only one who knew our Armand by sight. But, as for the 'miracle' of the locked room . . ."

"And that is all?" cried Jenny.

"Sure. What else did you expect?"

"I am disappoint!" suddenly exclaimed Jenny, hammering her fists on her knees. "I think this is a miracle. I think it cannot be solved. And then you show it is easy as eating sweets. Sir H.M., I hate you!"

The subsequent behavior of Sir Henry Merrivale, his martyrdom and his passionate addresses to the ceiling, is best left undescribed.

"So that's all the thanks I get, hey? They come to me and say, 'It's a miracle.' I say, 'It ain't,' and show 'em how it's done. Then they say, 'Oh, is that all? Silly old dummy! Stick him in the dustbin again.'"

It was fully half an hour before they smoothed him down.

"Very well!" he said, with a dark look at Jenny. "I'll not state what I think of some people. I'll just tell you what happened next and upset the whole apple cart. Aunt Hester had to drag a very sick and scared gal all the way to St. Paul's, so that Armand's hired ventriloquist could perform on time.

"But the apple cart was upset with an awful smash. 'Steve Lamoreux,' sittin' in the car just as he said he did, saw you run down the steps of St. Paul's and literally fall into this young feller's arms. When you went into the tea shop — well, Bob's your uncle. You bet he sneaked in and listened behind the partition. What he heard was just what he'd feared. You two were practically fallin' into each other's arms over the tea."

"I feel like this," Jenny confessed.

"I still feel like it," said Tom.

"Shut up," said the great man. "There were several courses open to 'Steve Lamoreux.' He chose the best, which was winnin' Tom Lockwood's confidence and stayin' close to him. So he deliberately sent this gal to me,

supremely and conceitedly thinkin' the old goop would never see through *his* scheme.

"After Aunt Hester's row in the tea shop," here H.M. looked at Tom, "he went in and told his story. He more than won your confidence, son. He won your friendship."

"Yes," admitted Tom, and looked down at a closed fist. "He did."

"Of course, he couldn't go with you when you came to my office. He admitted the gal mustn't meet him. What he did is easy to guess. He followed you, and hung about in Horse Guards Avenue. D'ye know, I think I can see his face when we three piled downstairs and out to a police car, and I gave the address of his own hired ventriloquist.

"He got to the house about fifty seconds before we did, probably by waving a fiver in under a taxi-driver's nose. He nipped in by the back door, struck faster than a snake, and nipped out the same way while Johnson's body rolled down the front steps.

"And that tore it. As I said, the whole aspect of the business had changed.

"According to what I could deduce about the gas fire and the whispering gallery, *nobody* was actually trying to kill this gal. Somebody was trying to frighten her so much that she'd take the first plane back to Paris.

"Now who would be interested in doin' that, in conjunction with Aunt Hester? Who? You guess. And what about this odd 'American' or 'Canadian' who kept turning up all over the

place without any explanation? Everybody promised to explain him; but nobody did."

H.M. pulled down his spectacles and glowered at Jenny over them.

"You see, my dolly, why I wanted you to go back to your aunt's house that night? You weren't in any real danger. And it wasn't likely somebody would try any games that night. If anything happened at all, it would happen during the expedition to Hampton Court next day — for one thing, Aunt Hester was far too insistent about takin' you there.

"And I could be there to stop it. And yet, burn me, I nearly missed it!"

The somber spectacles were now turned towards Tom.

"Son," observed H.M., "did you see the look on 'Steve Lamoreux's' face when you shouted along the path and asked this gal to marry you? And she said yes?"

"No, but I heard his voice. It was a voice I'd never heard him use before."

"Well! When it turned out you had tons of money and they couldn't accuse you of being a fortune hunter, did you notice him at any time after that?"

"Yes! His face was all pinched up and as pale as dough. But I thought—"

"Maybe you did. He had a knife with him, just in case. And that was the time he finally decided you were goin' to die."

Jenny pressed her face in her hands, and turned away.

"Oh, I was the villain!" said H.M. "In my role of guidè, I wanted to see how Aunt Hester would act when she met Steve Lamoreux face to face. She behaved pretty well, but she couldn't keep her eyes from slidin' away when she mentioned the gal's *fiancé*.

"It was a silly-ass thing to do. I admit it. 'Cause I'd already made up my mind. That same day, since Armand de Sennerville had been attached to the Yanks, I got his record and saw his photograph. To put the tin hat on it, 'Steve Lamoreux' had the stargazin' cheek to walk into my office and spin his yarn.

"Even if I hadn't known already, the idiot gave himself away. He *would* smoke Yellow French cigarettes, and use sulphur matches. Even when he was very excited, he automatically held the match away from him until the sulphur had burned off —"

"Yes," interrupted Tom. "I saw him do that. But what about it?"

"Oh, son! He claimed he'd been in France only six months —"

"Yes, that's what he told me too!"

"And no foreigner on earth, after only six months in France, can get used to those sulphur matches. You always forget and swallow a lungful of sulphur. Only a Frenchman native-born automatically holds the match away for a few seconds. There, in my own office, was a Frenchman speakin' the most exquisite Yank.

"But *you* were the one in real danger, son. If I'd known beforehand you'd spent the night before prowlin' round this gal's windows with Armand de

Senneville, I'd have had a fit. I repeat: he struck like a snake and killed poor old Johnson. Why? Just because he didn't want this gal to find out that it was *he* who was scaring her, or he'd lose her.

"Finally, last night at Hampton Court, I still don't know what funny business de Senneville, or Aunt Hester, or both of 'em, had planned. There wasn't time — the fireworks went up with a bang. I tried to keep you from goin' into that maze. Didn't you see me look round? Didn't you notice Lamoreux had slipped away? You dashed into the maze. He must have crawled up on top of it — we didn't see him enter — and followed you. But sometimes, for chivalrous young fools like you, there is mercy. You met the tough egg with his knife, and you knocked him flat. And that was the end."

There was a long silence, until Tom cleared his throat.

"H.M. What will they do to him?"

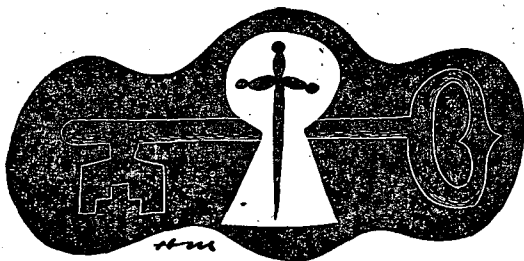
"Oh, they can't prove yet he killed Johnson. Not yet. In the meantime, he'll do a long stretch on two counts of attempted murder: with gas and with a knife. Then the coppers will snaffle him for killing Johnson. And he'll get what he deserves, son — he'll hang."

Jenny stood up suddenly, trembling. Tom put his arms around her, and held her tightly.

"It's all right!" he insisted. "Jenny, dear, it's all right!"

"Yes," said Jenny, holding him just as tightly, "but that is why you must not leave me, ever. It is all right. — now!"

For once in his life, Sir Henry Merrivale did not roar out about canoodling in his office. Slowly, somberly, he got up from his chair and wandered over to one of the windows. There, his hands folded behind his back, he stood looking out over the river and the mighty curve of London.



We welcome another new name to the pages of EQMM — Harry Muheim. Mr. Muheim was born in San Francisco, graduated from Stanford University, and worked at Columbia Pictures in Hollywood before becoming a member of the United States Navy. He learned Japanese at the Navy Language School and was then sent to the Pacific as an interrogator and interpreter. After the war he went back to Stanford for his M.A. In 1949 he won the Albert M. Bender award for creative writing in California. Since 1950 he has lived near New York — “submerged in suburbia” — where he is on the faculty of New York University and in spare time is one of the regular writers for NBC’s Philco Television Playhouse. As a matter of fact, we seem to recall that Mr. Muheim adapted his own story, “The Dusty Drawer,” for TV, and very successfully too; it is the story of a college botany teacher who planned and executed a “sweet revenge.”

THE DUSTY DRAWER

by HARRY MUHEIM

NORMAN LOGAN PAID FOR HIS apple pie and coffee, then carried his tray toward the front of the cafeteria. From a distance, he recognized the back of William Tritt’s large head. The tables near Tritt were empty, and Logan had no desire to eat with him, but they had some unfinished business that Logan wanted to clear up. He stopped at Tritt’s table and asked, “Do you mind if I join you?”

Tritt looked up as he always looked up from inside his teller’s cage in the bank across the street. He acted like a servant — like a fat, precise butler that Logan used to see in movies — but behind the film of obsequiousness was an attitude of vast superiority that always set Logan on edge.

“Why, yes, Mr. Logan. Do sit

down. Only please, I must ask you not to mention that two hundred dollars again.”

“Well, we’ll see about that,” said Logan, pulling out a chair and seating himself. “Rather late for lunch, isn’t it?”

“Oh, I’ve had lunch,” Tritt said. “This is just a snack.” He cut a large piece of roast beef from the slab in front of him and thrust it into his mouth. “I don’t believe I’ve seen you all summer,” he added, chewing the meat.

“I took a job upstate,” Logan said. “We were trying to stop some kind of blight in the apple orchards.”

“Is that so?” Tritt looked like a concerned bloodhound.

“I wanted to do some research out

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West," Logan went on, "but I couldn't get any money from the university."

"You'll be back for the new term, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," Logan said with a sigh, "we begin again tomorrow." He thought for a moment of the freshman faces that would be looking up at him in the lecture room. A bunch of high-strung, mechanical New York City kids, pushed by their parents or by the Army into the university, and pushed by the university into his botany class. They were brick-bound people who had no interest in growing things, and Logan sometimes felt sad that in five years of teaching he had communicated to only a few of them his own delight with his subject.

"My, one certainly gets a long vacation in the teaching profession," Tritt said. "June through September."

"I suppose," Logan said. "Only trouble is that you don't make enough to do anything in all the spare time."

Tritt laughed a little, controlled laugh and continued chewing. Logan began to eat the pie. It had the drab, neutral flavor of all cafeteria pies.

"Mr. Tritt," he said, after a long silence.

"Yes?"

"When are you going to give me back my two hundred dollars?"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Logan. We had this all out ten months ago. We went over it with Mr. Pinkson and the bank examiners and everyone. I did *not* steal two hundred dollars from you."

"You did, and you know it."

"Frankly, I'd rather not hear any more about it."

"Mr. Tritt, I had three hundred and twenty-four dollars in my hand that day. I'd just cashed some bonds. I know how much I had."

"The matter has all been cleared up," Tritt said coldly.

"Not for me, it hasn't. When you entered the amount in my checking account, it was for one hundred and twenty-four, not three hundred twenty-four."

Tritt put down his fork and carefully folded his hands. "I've heard you tell that story a thousand times, sir. My cash balanced when you came back and complained."

"Sure it balanced," Logan exploded.

"You saw your mistake when Pinkson asked you to check the cash. So you took my two hundred out of the drawer. No wonder it balanced!"

Tritt laid a restraining hand on Logan's arm. "Mr. Logan, I'm going a long, long way in the bank. I simply can't afford to make mistakes."

"You also can't afford to admit it when you do make one."

"Oh, come now," said Tritt, as though he were speaking to a child. "Do you think I'd jeopardize my entire career for two hundred dollars?"

"You didn't jeopardize your career," Logan snapped. "You knew you could get away with it. And you took my money to cover your error."

Tritt sat calmly and smiled a fat smile at Logan. "Well, that's your version, Mr. Logan. But I do wish you'd quit annoying me with your

fairy tale." Leaving half his meat untouched, Tritt stood up and put on his hat. Then he came around the table and stood looming over Logan. "I will say, however, from a purely hypothetical point of view, that if I *had* stolen your money and then staked my reputation on the lie that I hadn't, the worst thing I could possibly do would be to return the money to you. I think you'd agree with that."

"I'll get you, Tritt," said Logan, sitting back in the chair. "I can't stand to be had."

"I know, I know. You've been saying that for ten months, too. Goodbye."

Tritt walked out of the cafeteria. Norman Logan sat there motionless, watching the big teller cross the street and enter the bank. He felt no rage — only an increased sense of futility. Slowly, he finished his coffee.

A few minutes later, Logan entered the bank. Down in the safe-deposit vaults he raised the lid of his long metal box and took out three twenty-five-dollar bonds. With a sigh, he began to fill them out for cashing. They would cover his government insurance premium for the year. In July, too, he had taken three bonds from the box, when his father had overspent his pension money. And earlier in the summer, Logan had cashed some more of them, after slamming into a truck and damaging his Plymouth. Almost every month there was some reason to cash bonds, and Logan reflected that he hadn't bought one since his Navy days. There just wasn't enough money in botany.

With the bonds in his hand, he climbed the narrow flight of stairs to the street floor, then walked past the long row of tellers' cages to the rear of the bank. Here he opened an iron gate in a low marble fence and entered the green-carpeted area of the manager and assistant manager. The manager's desk was right inside the gate, and Mr. Pinkson looked up as Logan came in. He smiled, looking over the top of the glasses pinched on his nose.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Logan." Pinkson's quick eyes went to the bonds and then, with the professional neutrality of a branch bank manager, right back up to Logan's thin face. "If you'll just sit down, I'll buzz Mr. Tritt."

"Mr. Tritt?" said Logan, surprised.

"Yes. He's been moved up to the first cage now."

Pinkson indicated a large, heavy table set far over against the side wall in back of his desk, and Logan sat in a chair next to it.

"Have a good summer?" The little man had revolved in his squeaky executive's chair to face Logan.

"Not bad, thanks."

"Did you get out of the city?"

"Yes, I had a job upstate. I always work during my vacations."

Mr. Pinkson let out a controlled chuckle, a suitable reply when he wasn't sure whether or not the customer was trying to be funny. Then he revolved again; his chubby cue-ball head bobbed down, and he was back at his figures.

Logan put the bonds on the clean

desk blotter and looked over at Tritt's cage. It was at the near end of the row of cages, with a door opening directly into the manager's area. Tritt was talking on the telephone inside, and for a long, unpleasant minute Logan watched the fat, self-assured face through the greenish glass. I'll get him yet, Logan thought. But he didn't see how. Tritt had been standing firmly shielded behind his lie for nearly a year now, and Norman Logan didn't seem to know enough about vengeance to get him.

Restive, Logan sat back and tipped the chair onto its hind legs. He picked ineffectually at a gravy stain on his coat; then his eye was attracted to a drawer, hidden under the overhang of the tabletop. It was a difficult thing to see, for it had no handle, and its face was outlined by only a thin black crack in the dark-stained wood. Logan could see faintly the two putty-filled holes that marked the place where the handle had once been. Curious, he rocked forward a little and slipped his fingernails into the crack along the bottom of the drawer. He pulled gently, and the drawer slid smoothly and silently from the table.

The inside was a dirty, cluttered mess. Little mounds of grayish mold had formed on the furniture glue along the joints. A film of dust on the bottom covered the bits of faded yellow paper and rusted paper clips that were scattered about. Logan rocked the chair back farther, and the drawer came farther out to reveal a delicate spider web. The spider was dead and

flaky, resting on an old page from a desk calendar. The single calendar sheet read October 2, 1936. Logan pushed the drawer softly back into the table, wondering if it had actually remained closed since Alf Landon was running against Roosevelt.

The door of Tritt's cage clicked open, and he came out, carrying a large yellow form. William Tritt moved smoothly across the carpet, holding his fat young body erect, and making a clear effort to keep his stomach in. "Why, hello, Mr. Logan," he said. "I'm sorry for the delay: The main office called me. I can't hang up on them, you know."

"I know," Logan said.

The teller smiled as he lowered himself into the chair opposite Logan. Logan slid the bonds across the table.

"It's nice to see you again," Tritt said pleasantly as he opened his fountain pen. "Preparing for the new semester, I suppose?" There was no indication of their meeting across the street. Logan said nothing in reply, so Tritt went to work, referring rapidly to the form for the amount to be paid on each bond. "Well, that comes to sixty-seven dollars and twenty-five cents," he said, finishing the addition quickly.

Logan filled out a deposit slip. "Will you put it in my checking account, please?" He handed his passbook across the table. "And will you please enter the right amount?"

"Certainly, Mr. Logan," Tritt said, smiling indulgently. Logan watched carefully as Tritt made the entry.

Then the teller walked rapidly back to his cage, while Logan, feeling somehow compelled to do so, took another glance into the dusty drawer.

He kept thinking about the drawer as he got on a bus and rode up to the university. It had surprised him to stumble upon a dirty, forgotten place like that in a bank that was always so tidy.

Back in the biology department, Logan sat down at his desk, planning to prepare some roll sheets for his new classes. He stayed there for a long time without moving. The September sun went low behind the New Jersey Palisades, but he did not prepare the sheets, for the unused drawer stayed unaccountably in his mind.

Suddenly he sat forward in his chair. In a surprising flash of creative thought, he had seen how he could make use of the drawer. He wasn't conscious of having tried to develop a plan. The entire plan simply burst upon him all at once, and with such clarity and precision that he hardly felt any responsibility for it. He would rob the bank and pin the robbery on Tritt. That would take care of Tritt.

In the weeks that followed, Norman Logan remained surprisingly calm about his plan. Each time he went step by step over the mechanics of the robbery, it seemed more gem-like and more workable. He made his first move the day he got his November pay check.

Down on Fifty-first Street, Logan went into a novelty-and-trick store

and bought a cigarette case. It was made of a dark, steel-blue plastic, and it looked like a trim .38 automatic. When the trigger was pressed, a section of the top of the gun flipped up on a hinge, revealing the cigarettes inside the handle.

With this in his pocket, Logan took a bus way down to the lower part of Second Avenue and entered a grimy little shop displaying pistols and rifles in the window. The small shopkeeper shuffled forward, and Logan asked to see a .38.

"Can't sell you a thing until I see your permit. The Sullivan Law."

"Oh, I don't want to buy a weapon," Logan explained. He took out his plastic gun. "I just want to see if the real thing looks like mine here."

The little man laughed a cackle laugh and brought up a .38 from beneath the counter, placing it next to Logan's. "So you'll just be fooling around, eh?"

"That's right," said Logan, looking at the guns. They were almost identical.

"Oh, they look enough alike," said the man. "But lemme give you a little tip. Put some scotch tape over that lid to keep it down. Friend of mine was using one of those things, mister. He'd just polished off a stick-up when he pulled the trigger and the lid flopped open. Well, he tried to offer the victim a cigarette, but the victim hauled off and beat the hell out of him."

"Thanks," Logan said with a smile. "I'll remember that."

"Here, you can put some Scotch tape on right now."

Logan walked over to the Lexington Avenue line and rode uptown on the subway. It was five minutes to 3 when he got to the bank. The old, gray-uniformed guard touched his cap as Logan came through the door. The stand-up desks were crowded, so it was natural enough for Logan to go through the little iron gate and cross to the table with the drawer. Mr. Pinkson and the new assistant manager had already left; their desks were clear.

As Logan sat down, Tritt stuck his head out the door of his cage.

"More bonds, Mr. Logan?" he asked.

"No," said Logan. "Just a deposit."

Tritt closed the door and bent over his work. Logan took out his wallet, removed the pay check, then looked carefully the length of the bank. No one was looking in his direction. As he put the wallet back into his inside coat pocket, he withdrew the slim plastic gun and eased open the drawer. He dropped the gun in, shut the drawer, deposited the check, and went home to his apartment. In spite of the Sullivan Law, he was on his way.

Twice during November he used the table with the drawer. Each time he checked on the gun. It had not been moved. By the time he deposited his December check, Logan was completely certain that nobody ever looked in there. On the nineteenth of the month, he decided to take the big step. . . .

Next morning, after his ten o'clock class, Logan walked six blocks through the snow down the hill to the bank. He took four bonds out of his safe-deposit box and filled them for cashing. The soothing sound of recorded Christmas carols floated down from the main floor.

Upstairs, he seated himself at the heavy table to wait for Tritt. Pinkson had nodded and returned to his figuring; the nervous assistant manager was not around. The carols were quite loud here, and Logan smiled at this unexpected advantage. He placed the bonds squarely on the blotter. Then he slipped open the drawer, took out the gun with his left hand, and held it below the table.

Tritt was coming toward him, carrying his bond chart. They said hello, and Tritt sat down and went to work. He totaled the sum twice and said carefully, still looking at the figures, "Well, Mr. Logan, that comes to eighty-three fifty."

"I'll want something in addition to the eighty-three fifty," said Logan, leaning forward and speaking in an even voice.

"What's that?" asked Tritt.

"Ten thousand dollars in twenty-dollar bills."

Tritt's pink face smiled. He started to look up into Logan's face, but his eyes froze on the muzzle of the gun poking over the edge of the table. He did not notice the Scotch tape.

"Now just go to your cage and get the money," Logan said.

It was William Tritt's first experi-

ence with anything like this. "Mr. Logan. Come now, Mr. Logan . . ." He swallowed and tried to start again, but his self-assurance had deserted him. He turned toward Pinkson's back.

"Look at me," snapped Logan.

Tritt turned back. "Mr. Logan, you don't know what you're doing."

"Keep still."

"Couldn't we give you a loan or perhaps a —"

"Listen to me, Tritt." Logan's voice was just strong enough to carry above *The First Noel*. He was amazed at how authoritative he sounded. "Bring the the money in a bag. Place it on the table here."

Tritt started to object, but Logan raised the gun slightly, and the last resistance drained from Tritt's fat body.

"All right, all right. I'll get it." As Tritt moved erratically toward his cage, Logan dropped the gun back into the drawer and closed it. Tritt shut the door of the cage, and his head disappeared below the frosted part of the glass. Immediately, Mr. Pinkson's telephone buzzed, and he picked it up. Logan watched his back, and, after a few seconds, Pinkson's body stiffened. Logan sighed, knowing then that he would not get the money on this try.

Nothing happened for several seconds; then suddenly the little old guard came rushing around the corner of the cages, his big pistol drawn and wobbling as he tried to hold it on Logan.

"Okay. Okay. Stay there! Put your hands up, now!"

Logan raised his hands, and the guard turned to Pinkson with a half-surprised face. "Okay, Mr. Pinkson. Okay, I've got him covered now."

Pinkson got up as Tritt came out of the cage. Behind the one gun, the three men came slowly toward Logan.

"Careful, Louis, he's armed," Tritt warned the guard.

"May I ask what this is all about?" Logan said, his hands held high.

"Mr. Logan," said Pinkson, "I'm sorry about this, but Mr. Tritt here tells me that — that —"

"That you tried to rob me of ten thousand dollars," said Tritt, his voice choppy.

"I — I *what?*"

"You just attempted an armed robbery of this bank," Tritt said slowly. "Don't try to deny it."

Logan's face became the face of a man so completely incredulous that he cannot speak. He remembered not to overplay it, though. First he simply laughed at Tritt. Then he lowered his hands, regardless of the guard's gun, and stood up, the calm, indignant faculty member.

"All I can say, Mr. Tritt, is that I do deny it."

"Goodness," said Pinkson.

"Better take his gun, Louis," Tritt ordered the guard.

The guard stepped gingerly forward to Logan and frisked him, movie style. "Hasn't got a gun, Mr. Tritt," he said.

"Of course he's got a gun," snapped Tritt. He pushed the guard aside.

"It's right in his coat," Tritt jammed his thick hand into Logan's left coat pocket and flailed it about. "It's not in that pocket," he said after a moment.

"It's not in any pocket," Logan said. "I don't have one."

"You do. You *do* have a gun. I saw it," Tritt answered, beginning to sound like a child in an argument. He spun Logan around and pulled the coat off him with a jerk. The sleeves turned inside out. Eagerly, the teller pulled the side pockets out, checked the inside pocket and the breast pocket, then ran his hands over the entire garment, crumpling it. "The — the gun's not in his coat," he said finally.

~~"It's not in his pants," the guard~~
added.

Tritt stepped over to the table quickly. "It's around here somewhere," he said. "We were sitting right here." He stood directly in front of the closed drawer, and his hands began to move meaninglessly over the tabletop. He picked up the neat stack of deposit slips, put them down again, then looked under the desk blotter, as though it could have concealed a gun.

Logan knew he had to stop this. "Is there any place I can remove the rest of my clothes?" he asked loudly, slipping the suspenders from his shoulders. Several depositors had gathered on the other side of the marble fence to watch, and Mr. Pinkson had had enough.

"Oh, no, no," he said, almost shouting. "That won't be necessary,

Mr. Logan. Louis said you were unarmed. Now, Louis, put *your* gun away, and for goodness' sake, request the customers to please move on."

"But Mr. Pinkson, you must believe me," Tritt said, coming over to the manager. "This man held a gun on me and —"

"It's hard to know what to believe," said Pinkson. "But no money was stolen, and I don't see how we can embarrass Mr. Logan further with this matter. Please, Mr. Logan, do pull up your suspenders."

It was a shattering moment for the teller — the first time his word had ever been doubted at the bank.

"But, sir, I insist that this man —"

"I must ask you to return to your cage now, Mr. Tritt," Pinkson said, badly agitated. Tritt obeyed.

The manager helped Logan put on his coat, then steered him over to his desk. "This is all a terrible mistake, Mr. Logan. Please do sit down now, please." The friendly little man was breathing heavily. "Now I just want you to know that if you should press this complaint, it — it would go awfully bad for us down in the main office downtown, and I —"

"Please don't get so excited, Mr. Pinkson," Logan said with a smile. "I'm not going to make any complaint." Logan passed the whole thing off casually. Mr. Tritt imagined, he saw a gun, that's all. It was simply one of those aberrations that perfectly normal people get occasionally. Now, could Mr. Pinkson finish cashing his bonds? The manager paid him the

eighty-three fifty, continuing to apologize.

Logan left the bank and walked through the soft snowfall, whistling a Christmas carol. He had handled himself perfectly.

In the weeks that followed, Logan continued to do business with Tritt, just as though nothing had happened. The teller tried to remain aloof and calm, but he added sums incorrectly, and his hands shook. One day late in January, Tritt stood halfway through a transaction, his great body trembling. "Excuse me, Mr. Logan," he murmured, and rushed off into the corridor behind the cages. Pinkson followed him, and Logan took advantage of the moment to check on the gun. It lay untouched in the drawer. Then Pinkson came back alone. "I'm awfully sorry to delay you again, sir," he said. "Mr. Tritt doesn't feel too well."

"Did he imagine he saw another gun?" Logan asked quietly.

"No. He just upsets easily now. Ever since that incident with you last month, he's been like a cat on a hot stove."

"I've noticed he's changed."

"He's lost that old, calm banking touch, Mr. Logan. And of course, he's in constant fear of a new hallucination."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Logan said, looking genuinely concerned. "It's very sad when a person loses his grip."

"It's particularly disappointing to me," the manager said sadly. "I

brought Tritt into the bank myself, you see. Had him earmarked for a big spot downtown some day. Fine man. Intelligent, steady, accurate — why, he's been right down the line on everything. But now — now he's — well, I do hope he gets over this."

"I can understand how you feel," Logan said sympathetically. He smiled inside at the precision of his planning. Fat William Tritt had been undermined just enough — not only in Pinkson's mind, but in his own.

On the tenth of March, Norman Logan acted again. When Tritt was seated across the table from him, Logan said, "Well, here we go again, Mr. Tritt." Tritt's head came up, and once more he was looking into the barrel of the toy automatic. He did not try to speak. "Now go get the ten thousand," ordered Logan. "And this time, do it."

Without objecting, the teller moved quickly to his cage. Logan slipped the gun back into the drawer; then he took his brief case from the floor and stood it on the edge of the table. Pinkson's telephone didn't buzz, and the guard remained out of sight. After a few moments, Tritt came out of the cage, carrying a small cloth bag.

"All right, continue with the bonds," Logan said. "The bag goes on the table between us." Logan shifted forward and opened the bag, keeping the money out of sight behind the brief case. The clean new bills were wrapped in thousand-dollar units, each package bound with a bright yellow strip of paper. Logan counted through one

package, and, with Tritt looking right at him, he placed the package of money carefully in the brief case.

"There," he said. "Now finish with the bonds." Tritt finished filling out the form and got Logan's signature. He was not as flustered as Logan had thought he'd be. "Now listen, Tritt," Logan went on, "my getaway is all set, of course, but if you give any signal before I'm out of the bank, I'll put a bullet into you — right here." Logan pointed to the bridge of his own nose. "Please don't think I'd hesitate to do it. Now get back to your cage."

Tritt returned to the cage. While his back was turned, Logan slipped the bag of money from his brief case and dropped it into the drawer, next to the gun. He eased the drawer into the table, took the brief case, and walked out of the bank.

Outside, he stood directly in front of the entrance, as though he were waiting for a bus. After just a few seconds the burglar alarm went off with a tremendous electrical shriek, and the old guard came running out of the door after him.

He was followed immediately by Pinkson, the assistant manager, and Tritt.

"Well, gentlemen," said Logan, his hands raised again in front of the guard's gun, "here we are again, eh?"

A crowd was gathering, and Pinkson sent the assistant to turn off the alarm. "Come, let's all go inside," he said. "I don't want any fuss out here."

It was the same kind of scene that

they had played before, only now Logan — the twice-wronged citizen — was irate, and now ten thousand dollars was missing from William Tritt's cage. Tritt was calm, though.

"I was ready for him this time," he said proudly to Pinkson. "I marked ten thousand worth of twenties. My initial is on the band. The money's in his brief case."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Tritt," Logan shouted suddenly, "who ever heard of making a getaway by waiting for a bus. I don't know what your game is, but —"

"Never mind my game," said Tritt. "Let's just take a look in your brief case."

He wrenched it from Logan's hand, clicked the lock, and turned the brief case upside down. A group of corrected examination books fell out. That was all.

"See?" said Logan. "Not a cent." The guard put away his gun as Pinkson began to pick up the scattered books.

Tritt wheeled, threw the brief case against the wall, and grabbed Logan by the lapels. "But I gave you the money. I did. I did!" His face was pasty gray, and his voice high. "You put it in the brief case. I saw you. I saw you do it!" He began to shake Logan in a kind of final attempt to shake the ten thousand dollars out of him.

Pinkson straightened up with the exam books and said, "For goodness' sake, Mr. Tritt. Stop it. Stop it."

Tritt stopped shaking Logan, then

turned wildly to Pinkson. "You don't believe me!" he shouted. "You don't believe me!"

"It's not a question of —"

"I'll find that money. I'll show you who's lying." He rushed over to the big table and swept it completely clear with one wave of his heavy arm. The slips fluttered to the floor, and the inkwell broke, splattering black ink over the carpet. Tritt pulled the table in a wild, crashing arc across the green carpet, smashing it into Pinkson's desk. Logan saw the dusty drawer come open about a half-inch.

The big man dropped clumsily to his knees and began to pound on the carpet with his flattened hands as he kept muttering, "It's around here some place — a cloth bag." He grabbed a corner of the carpet and flipped it back with a grunt. It made a puff of dust and revealed only a large triangle of empty, dirty floor. A dozen people had gathered outside the marble fence by now, and all the tellers were peering through the glass panes of the cages at Tritt.

"I'll find it! I'll find it!" he shouted. A film of sweat was on his forehead as he stood up, turned, and advanced again toward the table. The slightly opened drawer was in plain sight in front of him, but everyone's eyes were fixed on Tritt, and Tritt did not see the drawer under the overhang of the table.

Logan turned quickly to Pinkson and whispered, "He may be dangerous, Mr. Pinkson. You've got to calm him." He grabbed Pinkson by the arm

and pushed him backward several feet, so that the manager came to rest on the edge of the table, directly over the drawer. The exam books were still in his hand.

"Mr. Tritt, you *must* stop this!" Mr. Pinkson said.

"Get out of my way, Pinkson," said Tritt, coming right at him, breathing like a bull. "You believe him, but I'll show you. I'll find it!" He placed his hands on Pinkson's shoulders. "Now get away, you fool."

"I won't take that from anyone," snapped Pinkson. He slapped Tritt's face with a loud, stinging blow. The teller stopped, stunned, and suddenly began to cry.

"Mr. Pinkson. Mr. Pinkson, you've got to trust me."

Pinkson was immediately ashamed of what he had done. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, my boy. I shouldn't have done that."

"I tell you he held a gun on me again. A real gun — it's not my imagination."

"But why didn't you call Louis?" Pinkson said. "That's the rule, you know."

"I wanted to catch him myself. He — he made such a fool of me last time."

"But that business last time was hallucination," said Pinkson, looking over at Logan, who had nodded.

"It's no hallucination when ten thousand dollars is missing," Tritt shouted.

"That's precisely where the confusion arises in my mind," Mr. Pinkson

said slowly. "We'll get it straight, but in the meantime, I must order your arrest, Mr. Tritt."

Logan came and stood next to Pinkson, and they both looked sympathetically at the teller as he walked slowly, still sobbing, back to the cage.

"I'm just sick about it," Pinkson said.

"I think you'll find he's not legally competent," said Logan.

"Perhaps not."

Logan showed his concern by helping to clean up the mess that Tritt had made. He and the assistant manager placed the table back into its position against the far wall, Logan shoving the dusty drawer firmly closed with his fingertips as they lifted it.

Norman Logan returned to the bank late the next day. He sat at the table to make a deposit, and he felt a pleasantly victorious sensation surge through him as he slipped the gun and the ten thousand dollars out of the drawer and into his overcoat pocket. As he walked out the front door past the guard, he met Mr. Pinkson, who was rushing in.

"Terrible. Just terrible," the little man said, without pausing to say hello.

"What's that?" Logan asked calmly.

"I've just been talking to the doctors at Bellevue about Tritt," Pinkson said. "He seems all right, and they've released him. Unfortunately, he can answer every question except 'Where's the money?'" Logan held firmly to the money in his pocket and

continued to extend his sympathies.

Back at his apartment, Logan borrowed a portable typewriter from the man upstairs. Then he sat down and wrote a note:

Dear Mr. Pinkson:

I'm returning the money. I'm so sorry. I guess I didn't know what I was doing. I guess I haven't known for some time.

After looking up Tritt's initials on an old deposit slip, he forged a small tidy *W.T.* to the note.

Logan wiped his fingerprints from the bills and wrapped them, along with the note, in a neat package.

Then he drove to the post office nearest Tritt's apartment and mailed the money to Pinkson at the bank.

In the morning, Mr. Pinkson telephoned Logan at the university. "Well, it's all cleared up," he said, relieved but sad. "Tritt returned the money, so the bank is not going to press the charges. Needless to say, we're dropping Tritt. He not only denies having taken the money, he also denies having returned it."

"I guess he just doesn't know what he's doing," Logan said.

"Yes. That's what he said in the note. Anyway, Mr. Logan, I—I just wanted to call and apologize for the trouble we've caused you."

"Oh, it was no trouble for me. I was glad to be of help," Logan said quietly. "Delighted, in fact."

They said goodbye then, and Logan walked across the hall to begin his ten-o'clock botany lecture.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Virginia Jones's "The Compleat Murderess" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest. Considering that it is the work of a newcomer to the detective-crime field and a beginner in the art of assembling words and phrases, Mrs. Jones's story is irresistible: it is delicious and witty.

The author is in her early forties, the mother of two strapping sons. Her husband is an attorney for an oil company. For a full year before writing and submitting her first story, Mrs. Jones attended a creative writing class at the University of Tulsa, under the direction of Mrs. LaVere Anderson. "The Compleat Murderess" was, of course, written between household chores. The only previous writing Mrs. Jones had done were a few book reviews — of detective stories, needless to say — for the "Tulsa World" and a Sunday column for the same paper on "The Effect of Mystery Story Reading on a Busy Housewife" (that was not the exact title, but if Mrs. Jones still has a clipping or carbon copy, we would love to read her column!).

More comment to follow — but only after you have finished Mrs. Jones's delightful tale of an ineffectual little woman who, in the "sport" of murder, earned the right to be called "the compleat mangler" . . .

THE COMPLEAT MURDERESS

by VIRGINIA JONES

MRS. BOSWELL STARED MOODILY at the powdered glass she was stirring into the mashed potatoes. She was busy preparing dinner for a husband who wanted to leave her and she had planned a menu guaranteed to speed his departure. If her method was unorthodox, at least the meal was well-balanced in murderous fashion. The meat patties contained just a touch of roach paste, the salad was sprinkled with bits of bamboo splin-

ters from an old table mat, and the cream pie had been sitting out on the warm back porch for two days, developing its own lethal bacteria.

Her husband entered the house promptly at six o'clock. He threw his hat at the closet and, as usual, missed. He hung his coat over the doorknob, took his shoes off in the living room, and stretched out on the couch to read the evening paper. In five minutes, as usual, he was snoring,

and Mrs. Boswell, standing in the doorway, hands on her aproned hips, eyed him happily. "Soon he'll be sleeping The Big Sleep," she thought to herself. Then she went over and shook his shoulder, saying, "Frank, dinner's ready."

He got up from the couch, pushed past her into the dining room, and looked at the food on the table. He turned down the corners of his mouth and said, "I had the same thing for lunch. Can't you ever fix anything different? Scramble me a couple of eggs."

Mrs. Boswell sighed resignedly, threw the dinner into the garbage pail, and scrambled some eggs. She was not surprised that her first plan had miscarried. In the books she had been reading, the murderer nearly always failed the first time. "Try, try again," she said to herself encouragingly.

Amy Boswell, a small timid woman with the inner strength of a dish of gelatin, was ineffectual in almost everything she tried to do, and she did not really think she would prove any more proficient at murder than she had at being a good wife to Frank.

She had proved ineffectual even on their honeymoon. Frank had spent their wedding night tying trout flies in a cold, rustic cabin in the Rockies, while Amy hunched before an oil stove, doing her best to look feminine and enticing in a long flannelette nightgown topped with a sweat shirt. She had yet to learn from bitter experience that Frank, given even odds,

was more ardent as a fisherman than as a lover. Lures were more important to him than allure.

The days that followed were painful to remember. She had proved a disappointment to Frank from the moment her waders sprang a leak and she found herself swamped in the middle of a swift-moving, rocky stream. She could not sleep in the high, rarefied air of the mountains; the half-cooked greasy fish made her ill, and her fair, tender skin attracted mosquitoes from as far away as Cripple Creek.

After the honeymoon Amy discovered that Frank was not only addicted to fishing, he also liked badminton, ice skating, hockey, sail boating, skin-diving, and horses. The garage and his closet was crammed with multitudinous gear, the magazine rack was full of sports magazines, and the basement stocked with goggles, masks, fins, rackets, spears, skis, and a large outboard motor.

To Amy, whose idea of a good time was lunch in town and an afternoon at a movie, Frank was an enigma. And to Frank, Amy was a sportsman's Jonah. No matter how hard she tried, during the long years of their marriage, she could never catch a fish; her line invariably caught in a bush or snagged on Frank's pants. Outboard motors quit dead the moment she stepped into a boat. Sails ripped, golf balls gravitated toward water hazards, and tennis balls flew to the net like homing pigeons. Her ankles had a tendency to weaken on a

hike, and she could not even play ping-pong without cracking her head on the furnace pipes in their basement clubroom.

Frank did not give up easily. For many years he took her with him on hunting trips, and other hunters scurried prayerfully whenever Amy appeared, middle-aged and shapeless in her red flannel shirt and khaki pants, firing her gun wildly at anything that moved. It was not until she shot Frank's hat off one early morning in a duck blind that he finally decided it was hopeless.

Then he began leaving her at home while he went off with more congenial hunting partners. In the meantime, however, he had discovered that Amy's ineptness was not confined solely to field and stream. She not only couldn't cook greasy fish, she couldn't cook anything well. Meals were never on time, and when they belatedly arrived, they were likely to consist chiefly of a badly made noodle casserole which she had run across in an old cookbook. Shirts not only failed to come back from the laundry, sometimes she couldn't even remember which laundry she had sent them to. It was not a lack of intelligence. It was just that her mind skipped blithely over the more mundane matters of daily living.

Even so, all might have gone well with this ill-matched pair if Frank had not eventually met Someone Else at the country club where he played tennis every Saturday afternoon. One day he was paired with an

attractive divorcée in a mixed-doubles game. She was trim and capable in her crisp, white shorts. Her serve was strong, her backhand superb, and they easily won the first two sets, 6-2, 6-1. Afterward they sat on the shady lawn and drank Martinis, and Frank discovered that she was as pretty as she was athletic. He did not think it necessary to tell Amy just how many times he played golf and tennis with Sylvia Morton from then on. But Amy found out for herself one summer night at the club, when Frank had a few drinks too many and publicly fondled the athletic Sylvia while Amy sat white-faced and bewildered at a table with some friends.

"I want a divorce," he told her later that night, as they sat quarreling in the living room.

"I won't give you one," Amy had said, showing a degree of courage she did not know she possessed. "I love you, Frank."

"But I don't love you," Frank had replied, with undisguised candor. "You know we're not happy together."

"Why, I'm perfectly happy," Amy had answered, looking startled.

"Well, I'm not, and if you won't give me a divorce, I'll get one!"

"You haven't any grounds," said Amy mildly. "You know I've never done anything wrong."

"You've never done anything *right*, you mean," yelled Frank. "You're an incompetent, irresponsible fool, and I'm sick of you!"

Amy looked at him in shocked silence. She was as slow to anger as she was to any other emotion, but as she began to remember their life together, she was filled with bitterness.

"Just not getting a divorce isn't enough. He ought to suffer the way I have," she thought. She remembered the times she had trudged, wet and tired, through the woods with Frank; the days spent in a boat, wet sails flapping in her sunburned face; the dead, cold eyes of the fish she had scaled . . .

It wasn't long before she began to plan a campaign of torture, designed ultimately, she hoped, to end in murder. She started, crudely enough, with the powdered glass in the mashed potatoes. After the first fiasco, she tried one night to smash him up against the garage door with the car, as he was raising the overhead door.

"What the hell you trying to do, kill me?" he bellowed as he dodged nimbly out of the way.

"I'm sorry, dear," she said, more regretfully than Frank knew. "I put my foot on the wrong pedal."

She went with him to their summer home on the lake to close the cottage for the season and she overturned the canoe, which was nothing unusual for Amy. But in the water she clamped her arms about Frank's neck and held his head under water for two minutes. The record is supposed to be only three, though at the time Frank didn't even know he was competing. Lying wet and disgruntled on the bank, she thought with regret of the

day she had muffed her chance in the duck blind, when she had shot off Frank's hat instead of his head.

She began spending hours in the public library, browsing through detective and murder stories, gathering ideas but discarding most of them. "It's got to look like an accident," she thought. "The poison caper was a bust. I don't want to take a murder rap for that bum." Her speech began to take on the flavor of the books she was reading.

One day she discovered a little volume half hidden in the dusty stacks. *Murder for the Connoisseur*, it said on the faded vellum cover.

She opened it and found an alphabetical list of esoteric methods of murder, beginning with Anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis sounded nice. Frank was allergic to wasps, but it would not be easy to get him to hold still while a wasp stung him. Curare was also interesting, but where was she to obtain a pigmy with a poisoned spear? She came at last to Zombie and closed the book regretfully. There was nothing at all she could do with Zombie except hope that Frank would soon join their ranks.

All sorts of improbable ideas crossed her mind. "If we just lived in a bigger city," she thought, "I could push him in front of a subway train." She envisioned him trampled by a bull, caught in an elevator shaft, falling from a Ferris wheel, and once, growing reckless, she almost tipped her hand when they were playing darts with neighbors in the clubroom.

Throwing wildly at the board while Frank was still plucking darts from the cork board, she nearly pinned his ear to the wall.

The inability to find a Perfect Plan began to tell on Amy. Her nerves were stretched taut as fiddle strings and for a while she thought of giving up the whole idea. Still, one or two more avenues of approach were open. One Friday night, Frank went into the den and took down his twelve-gauge shotgun from the rack on the pine-paneled wall, and while he was smoothing the velvety stock, he nearly shot off the toe of his right foot. When Amy came running into the den, an incensed Frank met her at the door. "Have you been fiddling around with my guns?" he shouted.

Amy looked innocent and her lips trembled with disappointment.

"Why, dear, you know I never touch your guns! You've told me often enough how dangerous they are."

Frank pointed to the hole in the floor and said, "I damned near shot off my foot. Must be losing my mind. I never left a gun loaded before."

Amy went into her room and sat on the edge of the bed. "I'd better slow down," she said to herself. "I don't want to get in a panic and beat him to death with a duck decoy."

So for a full week nothing at all happened, and she didn't put much of anything in his food except a small dose of Black Leaf 40 in his tomato soup, and that only to keep her hand in while she bided her time.

The following Thursday night, Frank said casually, "I'm going out for the evening."

Amy looked at him and shrugged. "Suit yourself," she said quietly.

As Frank lay stretched out in a bathtub full of hot water, contemplating the thought of an evening of bowling with Sylvia, Amy came into the bathroom carrying her little table radio.

"Thought you might like to listen to the sports news," she said, placing the radio on a shelf above the basin. As she turned to go out, her heel seemed to tangle in the cord, and the little radio came tumbling down off the shelf. Unfortunately for Amy, the force of the fall pulled the cord out of the electric outlet in the wall and the radio merely hit Frank on the head.

"Damn it to hell," he shouted. "Get that thing out of here!" He stomped from the bathroom, pulled on his clothes, and opened the front door. He hesitated on the steps of the porch for just a moment.

"You're an absolute jinx," he yelled. "My life isn't worth a plugged nickel around you."

Then, as he started to run down the steps, his toe caught on a loose brick and he went plunging headlong to the sidewalk. His head hit dully on the cement and he did not get up.

Amy stood at the door and watched as a crowd gathered in response to her screams. She ran down the stairs and pillowed his head in her lap. "Call a doctor, someone," she begged. Frank moaned once, then tried to sit up, but

he couldn't make it. He looked up at Amy's face bent over him.

He had a moment or two of consciousness before he died, and he made the most of it. Whatever he saw in Amy's eyes — relief, satisfac-

tion, or shocked surprise — he realized it was certainly not love; for he said, plainly and distinctly, to the policeman who was now crouching beside him on the sidewalk, "She did it. She pushed me."

EDITORS' NOTE: *When we finished Mrs. Jones's story, on our first reading of it, we had almost a compulsion to add a paragraph. But on mulling it over, we found ourselves in two minds as to how the added paragraph should be phrased. Here is the first version that occurred to us:*

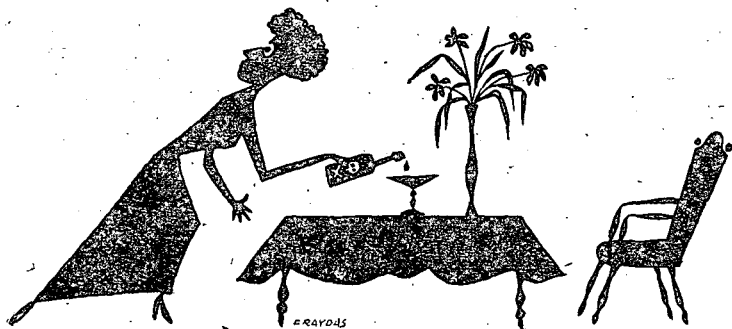
And the funny part of it was — the police believed Frank!

But on further consideration, this ending raised certain questions which we were unable to answer. For example, would the police accept Frank's accusation without some confirming evidence? So a second version of a final paragraph evolved, as follows:

But of course there were witnesses who had seen Frank trip all by himself. Even without the witnesses, the police would never have believed it of a timid, ineffectual creature like Amy Boswell.

And then another thought came to us: Is it possible that Mrs. Jones meant something else altogether?

What do you think?



Richard Harding Davis was one of the most popular novelists of his day, a world-famous newspaperman and war correspondent, a successful playwright, something of a prig and a poseur by later standards, a gay social figure, and in many respects the most typical Eastern American of his era . . . all of which explains why his work reflects so clearly the life and times of the sophisticated America of Mr. Davis's heyday.

Perhaps that is why we are now bringing you Richard Harding Davis's "Van Bibber's Burglar." But read the story first, and then we will explain further . . .

VAN BIBBER'S BURGLAR

by RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

THERE HAD BEEN A DANCE UPTOWN, but as Van Bibber could not find Her there, he accepted young Travers's suggestion to go over to Jersey City and see a "go" between "Dutchy" Mack and a large person professionally known as the Black Diamond. They covered up all signs of their evening dress with their great-coats, and filled their pockets with cigars, for the smoke which surrounds a "go" is trying to sensitive nostrils, and they also fastened their watches to both key-chains. Alf Alpin, who was acting as master of ceremonies, was greatly pleased and flattered at their coming, and boisterously insisted on their sitting on the platform. The fact was generally circulated among the spectators that the "two gents in high hats" had come in a carriage, and this and their patent-leather boots made them objects of keen interest. It was even

whispered that they were the "parties" who were putting up the money to back the Black Diamond against the "Hester Street Jackson." This in itself entitled them to respect. Van Bibber was asked to hold the watch, but he wisely declined the honor, which was given to Andy Spielman, the sporting reporter of the *Track and Ring*, whose watch-case was covered with diamonds, and was just the sort of a watch a timekeeper should hold.

It was 2 o'clock before "Dutchy" Mack's backer threw the sponge into the air, and 3 before they reached the city. They had another reporter in the cab with them besides the gentleman who had bravely held the watch in the face of several offers to "do for" him; and as Van Bibber was ravenously hungry, and as he doubted that he could get anything at that hour at the club, they accepted Spielman's invitation and went for a por-

terhouse steak and onions at the Owl's Nest, Gus McGowan's all-night restaurant on Third Avenue.

It was a very dingy, dirty place, but it was as warm as the engine-room of a steamboat, and the steak was perfectly done and tender. It was too late to go to bed, so they sat around the table, with their chairs tipped back and their knees against its edge. The two club men had thrown off their great-coats, and their wide shirt fronts and silk facings shone grandly in the smoky light of the oil lamps and the red glow from the grill in the corner. They talked about the life the reporters led, and the Philistines asked foolish questions, which the gentleman of the press answered without showing them how foolish they were.

"And I suppose you have all sorts of curious adventures," said Van Bibber, tentatively.

"Well, no, not what I would call adventures," said one of the reporters. "I have never seen anything that could not be explained or attributed directly to some known cause, such as crime or poverty or drink. You may think at first that you have stumbled on something strange and romantic, but it comes to nothing. You would suppose that in a great city like this one would come across something that could not be explained away — something mysterious or out of the common, like Stevenson's Suicide Club. But I have not found it so. Dickens once told James Payn that the most curious thing he ever saw

in his rambles around London was a ragged man who stood crouching under the window of a great house where the owner was giving a ball. While the man hid beneath a window on the ground floor, a woman wonderfully dressed and very beautiful raised the sash from the inside and dropped her bouquet down into the man's hand, and he nodded and stuck it under his coat and ran off with it.

"I call that, now, a really curious thing to see. But I have never come across anything like it, and I have been in every part of this big city, and at every hour of the night and morning, and I am not lacking in imagination either, but no captured maidens have ever beckoned to me from barred windows nor 'white hands waved from a passing hansom.' Balzac and De Musset and Stevenson suggest that they have had such adventures, but they never come to me. It is all commonplace and vulgar, and always ends in a police court or with a 'found drowned' in the North River."

McGowan, who had fallen into a doze behind the bar, woke suddenly and shivered and rubbed his shirt-sleeves briskly. A woman knocked at the side door and begged for a drink "for the love of heaven," and the man who tended the grill told her to be off. They could hear her feeling her way against the wall and cursing as she staggered out of the alley. Three men came in with a hack driver and wanted everybody to drink with them, and became insolent when the

gentlemen declined, and were in consequence hustled out one at a time by McGowan, who went to sleep again immediately, with his head resting among the cigar boxes and pyramids of glasses at the back of the bar, and snored.

"You see," said the reporter, "it is all like this. Night in a great city is not picturesque and it is not theatrical. It is sodden, sometimes brutal, exciting enough until you get used to it, but it runs in a groove. It is dramatic, but the plot is old and the motives and characters always the same."

The rumble of heavy market wagons and the rattle of milk carts told them that it was morning, and as they opened the door the cold fresh air swept into the place and made them wrap their collars around their throats and stamp their feet. The morning wind swept down the cross-street from the East River and the lights of the street lamps and of the saloon looked old and tawdry. Travers and the reporter went off to a Turkish bath, and the gentleman who held the watch, and who had been asleep for the last hour, dropped into a nighthawk and told the man to drive home. It was almost clear now and very cold, and Van Bibber determined to walk. He had the strange feeling one gets when one stays up until the sun rises, of having lost a day somewhere, and the dance he had attended a few hours before seemed to have come off long ago, and the fight in Jersey City was far back in the past.

The houses along the cross-street through which he walked were as dead as so many blank walls, and only here and there a lace curtain waved out of the open window where some honest citizen was sleeping. The street was quite deserted; not even a cat or a policeman moved on it and Van Bibber's footsteps sounded brisk on the sidewalk. There was a great house at the corner of the avenue and the cross-street on which he was walking. The house faced the avenue and a stone wall ran back to the brown stone stable which opened on the side street. There was a door in this wall, and as Van Bibber approached it on his solitary walk it opened cautiously, and a man's head appeared in it for an instant and was withdrawn again like a flash, and the door snapped to. Van Bibber stopped and looked at the door and at the house and up and down the street. The house was tightly closed, as though someone was lying inside dead, and the streets were still empty.

Van Bibber could think of nothing in his appearance so dreadful as to frighten an honest man, so he decided the face he had had a glimpse of must belong to a dishonest one. It was none of his business, he assured himself, but it was curious, and he liked adventure, and he would have liked to prove his friend the reporter, who did not believe in adventure, in the wrong. So he approached the door silently, and jumped and caught at the top of the wall and stuck one foot on the handle of the door, and, with the other on

the knocker, drew himself up and looked cautiously down on the other side. He had done this so lightly that the only noise he made was the rattle of the doorknob on which his foot had rested, and the man inside thought that the one outside was trying to open the door, and placed his shoulder to it and pressed against it heavily. Van Bibber, from his perch on the top of the wall, looked down directly on the other's head and shoulders. He could see the top of the man's head only two feet below, and he also saw that in one hand he held a revolver and that two bags filled with projecting articles of different sizes lay at his feet.

It did not need explanatory notes to tell Van Bibber that the man below had robbed the big house on the corner, and that if it had not been for his having passed when he did the burglar would have escaped with his treasure. His first thought was that he was not a policeman, and that a fight with a burglar was not in his line of life; and this was followed by the thought that though the gentleman who owned the property in the two bags was of no interest to him, he was, as a respectable member of society, more entitled to consideration than the man with the revolver.

The fact that he was now, whether he liked it or not, perched on the top of the wall like Humpty Dumpty, and that the burglar might see him and shoot him the next minute, had also an immediate influence on his movements. So he balanced himself

cautiously and noiselessly and dropped upon the man's head and shoulders, bringing him down to the flagged walk with him and under him. The revolver went off once in the struggle, but before the burglar could know how or from where his assailant had come, Van Bibber was standing up over him and had driven his heel down on his hand and kicked the pistol out of his fingers. Then he stepped quickly to where it lay and picked it up and said, "Now, if you try to get up I'll shoot at you." He felt an unwarranted and ill-timedly humorous inclination to add, "and I'll probably miss you," but subdued it. The burglar, much to Van Bibber's astonishment, did not attempt to rise, but sat up with his hands locked across his knees and said: "Shoot ahead. I'd a damned sight rather you would."

His teeth were set and his face desperate and bitter, and hopeless to a degree of utter hopelessness that Van Bibber had never imagined.

"Go ahead," reiterated the man, doggedly, "I won't move. Shoot me."

It was a most unpleasant situation. Van Bibber felt the pistol loosening in his hand, and he was conscious of a strong inclination to lay it down and ask the burglar to tell him all about it.

"You haven't got much heart," said Van Bibber, finally. "You're a pretty poor sort of a burglar, I should say."

"What's the use?" said the man, fiercely. "I won't go back — I won't

go back there alive. I've served my time forever in that hole. If I have to go back again — s'help me if I don't do for a keeper and die for it. But I won't serve there no more."

"Go back where?" asked Van Bibber, gently, and greatly interested; "to prison?"

"To prison, yes!" cried the man, hoarsely: "to a grave. That's where. Look at my face," he said, "and look at my hair. That ought to tell you where I've been. With all the color gone out of my skin, and all the life out of my legs. You needn't be afraid of me. I couldn't hurt you if I wanted to. I'm a skeleton and a baby, I am. I couldn't kill a cat. And now you're going to send me back again for another lifetime. For twenty years, this time, into that cold, forsaken hole, and after I done my time so well and worked so hard." Van Bibber shifted the pistol from one hand to the other and eyed his prisoner doubtfully.

"How long have you been out?" he asked, seating himself on the steps of the kitchen and holding the revolver between his knees. The sun was driving the morning mist away, and he had forgotten the cold.

"I got out yesterday," said the man.

Van Bibber glanced at the bags and lifted the revolver. "You didn't waste much time," he said.

"No," answered the man, sullenly, "no, I didn't. I knew this place and I wanted money to get West to my folks, and the Society said I'd have to wait until I earned it, and I couldn't wait. I haven't seen my wife

for seven years, nor my daughter. Seven years, young man; think of that — seven years. Do you know how long that is? Seven years without seeing your wife or your child! And they're straight people, they are," he added, hastily. "My wife moved West after I was put away and took another name, and my girl never knew nothing about me. She thinks I'm away at sea. I was to join 'em. That was the plan. I was to join 'em, and I thought I could lift enough here to get the fare, and now," he added, dropping his face in his hands, "I've got to go back. And I had meant to live straight after I got West, — God help me, but I did! Not that it makes much difference now. An' I don't care whether you believe it or not neither," he added, fiercely.

"I didn't say whether I believed it or not," answered Van Bibber, with grave consideration.

He eyed the man for a brief space without speaking, and the burglar looked back at him, doggedly and defiantly, and with not the faintest suggestion of hope in his eyes, or of appeal for mercy. Perhaps it was because of this fact, or perhaps it was the wife and child that moved Van Bibber, but whatever his motives were, he acted on them promptly. "I suppose, though," he said, as though speaking to himself, "that I ought to give you up."

"I'll never go back alive," said the burglar, quietly.

"Well, that's bad, too," said Van Bibber. "Of course I don't know

whether you're lying or not, and as to your meaning to live honestly, I very much doubt it; but I'll give you a ticket to wherever your wife is, and I'll see you on the train. And you can get off at the next station and rob my house tomorrow night, if you feel that way about it. Throw those bags inside that door where the servant will see them before the milkman does, and walk on out ahead of me, and keep your hands in your pockets, and don't try to run. I have your pistol, you know."

The man placed the bags inside the kitchen door; and, with a doubtful look at his custodian, stepped out into the street, and walked, as he was directed to do, toward the Grand Central station. Van Bibber kept just behind him, and kept turning the question over in his mind as to what he ought to do. He felt very guilty as he passed each policeman, but he recovered himself when he thought of the wife and child who lived in the West, and who were "straight."

"Where to?" asked Van Bibber, as he stood at the ticket-office window.

"Helena, Montana," answered the man with, for the first time, a look of relief.

Van Bibber bought the ticket and handed it to the burglar. "I suppose you know," he said, "that you can sell that at a place downtown for half the money."

"Yes, I know that," said the burglar.

There was a half-hour before the train left, and Van Bibber took

his charge into the restaurant and watched him eat everything placed before him, with his eyes glancing all the while to the right or left. Then Van Bibber gave him some money and told him to write to him, and shook hands with him. The man nodded eagerly and pulled off his hat as the car drew out of the station; and Van Bibber came downtown again with the shop girls and clerks going to work, still wondering if he had done the right thing.

He went to his rooms and changed his clothes, took a cold bath, and crossed over to Delmonico's for his breakfast, and, while the waiter laid the cloth in the café, glanced at the headings in one of the papers. He scanned first with polite interest the account of the dance on the night previous and noticed his name among those present. With greater interest he read of the fight between "Dutchy" Mack and the Black Diamond, and then he read carefully how "Abe" Hubbard, alias "Jimmie the Gent," a burglar, had broken jail in New Jersey, and had been traced to New York. There was a description of the man, and Van Bibber breathed quickly as he read it. "The detectives have a clue to his whereabouts," the account said; "if he is still in the city they are confident of recapturing him. But they fear that the same friends who helped him to break jail will probably assist him from the country or to get out West."

"They may do that," murmured Van Bibber to himself, with a smile

of grim contentment; "they probably will." I don't know. Some bacon and eggs and green things and buttered rolls and coffee."

Then he said to the waiter, "Oh,

Quite a few years ago Dr. Norbert Lederer, one-time collaborator of S. S. Van Dine, showed us a German anthology of detective-crime short stories. We don't remember the title of the volume, or when it was published, or even the editor's name. Indeed, the only specific thing we do recall about it was the fact that the book contained "Van Bibber's Burglar" — a choice that struck us at the time as exceedingly odd.

Just why did the German editor select "Van Bibber's Burglar" as a representative American crime story? Was it because the German editor felt that in an historical sense the story revealed the nostalgia of a bygone American era? Or was the German editor under the impression that the background of "Van Bibber's Burglar" portrayed a contemporary view of the American scene, and under this mistaken impression wanted to expose that faint aura of decadence which also characterizes the Raffles tales of approximately the same period? Or did the German editor merely succumb to the sentimentality of Mr. Davis's story?

Of course, we simply don't know. But we are again struck by something odd. Perhaps times do not change as much as we think — even in half a century or more. Surely you will agree that "Van Bibber's Burglar" is a surprisingly modern-sounding story, especially its writing style — remember, the tale first appeared in book form in 1891. Is Van Bibber, young man-about-town of the Delmonico era, so enormously different from today's men-about-town? Delmonico's may be gone, but The Stork Club and Twenty One and the dawn patrol of uppercrust society are still very much alive. Is Van Bibber's fight night in Jersey City so colossally different (except for today's home television version) from a fight night anywhere in the United States in the year of our Lord 1956? We wonder . . .

And is life in New York, of this or any other year, still not an eternal search for romance? — the wish for the strange and the picturesque rather than the commonplace and the everyday . . . Maybe that German editor wasn't so far from wrong after all.

AUTHOR:

BARRY PEROWNE

TITLE:

Jack of Diamonds

TYPE:

Thriller

CRIMINAL:

Raffles

LOCALE:

Gibraltar, chiefly

TIME:

The melodramatic '90s

COMMENTS:

A new romantic adventure of A. J. Raffles, the celebrated cricketer and cracksmán, with the authentic spirit, flavor, and derring-do of E. W. Hornung's original tales . . .

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF Gibraltar had been at the same school as Raffles and myself. As an unexpected consequence, I was occupying a corner seat in a First Class compartment of a train about to depart from a London station to connect with the liner *Karoo Star* at Southampton.

It was a bright autumn morning. Raffles had strolled along the platform to watch for our friend Ivor Kern, antique-dealer, receiver of stolen property, and ingenious artificer in woods and metals, who was to travel with us on the ship. The warmth of the sun shining through the open door of the compartment was pleasantly relaxing after the bustle of our arrival at the station in a hansom. It was not every day that we set forth to

be the guests of a Governor and, in an expansive mood, I felt that the occasion warranted a particularly fine cigar.

I was just lighting one when a figure came between me and the sun. Glancing over the match-flame, I saw standing on the platform, gazing at me with eyes of as nearly a true violet as I ever had seen, a girl dressed all in white, with a violet sash. The breeze that lightly stirred the ribbons of the hat in her hand, and toyed attractively with her shining, soft, blue-black hair, added to her appearance of pretty fluster.

"Please," she said breathlessly, "are all the seats taken in here or could you keep me one till the porter brings my luggage?"

"Certainly! I'll put something on

it," I said, and, springing to my feet, I took down Raffles's green baize cricket bag and placed it on the vacant seat at my side.

The girl rewarded me with a slightly distracted smile, turned away, seemed to hesitate, then impulsively turned back. "Pray excuse me," she said, "but do you know London well? I wonder if you could tell me — I've been here so few weeks, a visitor from Capetown — if a big shop called Paradix, in Piccadilly, is all *right*? I mean, honest — reliable?"

"As a Londoner myself," I said, "I can confidently reassure you on that point. Paradix of Piccadilly, one of the most famous of our ladies' apparel shops, is quite above reproach."

"You greatly relieve me," said the girl. "You see, it's getting so near train time, and they promised faithfully to send a page boy here to the station this morning with my new dresses that I've bought and already paid for. But they had to be altered and, unfortunately, as there are seven of them, they weren't quite ready when the shop closed yesterday. So they told me to look for their page boy here, bringing the dresses in bandboxes, and I just haven't seen a sign of any page boy, and — Oh!" She broke off. "Pray excuse me!"

She was gone. Smiling indulgently as I puffed at my cigar, I leaned from the doorway watching her until, a flutter of white and violet in the sunshine, she vanished among the passengers thronging the platform. How very like a girl, I reflected, to get her-

self in a fluster about dresses! A quite needless fluster, too, for a firm like Paradix of Piccadilly were, of-course, the acme of merchandising honour. However, on spotting the girl returning, I felt a twinge of anxiety for the good repute of London in the eyes of a charming young overseas visitor. For she was accompanied by no pert page boy flourishing bandboxes, but was alone and dejected.

"What," I said with concern as she approached, "no luck?"

"The boy's come, sure enough," she said, "but he's so stupid — he won't let me have them. He says there's an additional charge for the alterations — nine pounds fourteen shillings — and I've nothing left but a silly letter of credit for a hundred pounds, which the Purser on the ship will cash for me. The boy just refuses to come to Southampton with me to get the money there. He says his instructions are to get it at the station here, or he'll have to take the dresses back. I don't know how any boy can *be* so stupid! I shan't have a stitch to wear on the ship!"

"The main thing is," I said, relieved that a London firm had not failed in their promise to a visitor, "your bandboxes have arrived. Now, you'll of course permit me to make you a small advance, which you can repay to me on the ship. No, I won't hear a word! I insist!" I thrilled to the touch of her slim, cool fingers as I stopped her protests by pressing ten sovereigns into her palm. "Now, hurry and catch the boy before he leaves," I said,

"and I'll hold your seat for you."

The deep look she gave me as she hurried off was a promising augury for the coming days at sea. In fact, as I reseated myself, I wondered if there might not be a chance of persuading her to break her voyage at Gibraltar. It might help, I fancied, if I were to choose a good moment to let fall the information that Raffles and I were to be guests of the Governor.

We were not on intimate terms with His Excellency, as he had been at the school a good many years before our time; but he was a keen cricketer and had followed Raffles's career in that sport with special interest. So that when His Excellency had found himself sponsoring a Gala Cricket Week in Gibraltar, and had decided to invite a few good amateurs to come and stiffen the Government House side against some strong Army and Navy teams, the first person he had thought of was Raffles. In inviting him to come and to bring someone along with him, the Governor had added, "There's also an important service which you're the very man to carry out for me."

Intrigued by this, Raffles had accepted the invitation, saying he was bringing me. When Ivor Kern had heard where we were going, he had expressed his envy, and Raffles had said, "By all means desert this shop of yours and come along with us for the trip, Ivor. We go in the *Karoo Star*, which calls at Gibraltar on its way to Capetown, and return eight days later in the sister ship, the *Karoo*

Queen, which calls at Gibraltar on its way from Capetown."

As I leaned back in my corner seat, admiring the length of my cigar ash, the thought of escorting the girl with violet eyes to Government House garden parties enticed my mind to halcyon daydreams.

"Look at him, Ivor!" said a voice. "Purring away to himself like a cat that's swallowed a canary!" In light raglan overcoat and grey bowler, his keen face tanned, a pearl stickpin in his cravat, Raffles stepped into the compartment. "Hullo, what's my cricket bag hogging that seat beside you for, Bunny?"

"I'm reserving the seat for a young lady," I said. "She'll be here in a moment. Kindly remember that I saw her first."

"The point is well taken," Raffles conceded. "On the other hand, have you noticed that the train's beginning to move?"

Startled, I glanced from the window. It was true. The platform was streaming backward at a quickening tempo. Leaping up, to the ruin of my cigar ash, I thrust my head into the sunshine. Nowhere along the platform, now rapidly receding, could I see the girl.

"She seems to have missed the train," Raffles said.

"She couldn't have!" I exclaimed. "I just lent her ten pounds."

"Note the *non sequitur*, Ivor," said Raffles. "But tell us, Bunny, what were the circumstances of this accommodation?"

I explained the girl's predicament. And smiles broadened slowly over Raffles's face and the pale, young-old, cynically intelligent face of Ivor Kern, until it seemed to me that they were grinning from ear to ear.

"Oh, my dear chap!" said Raffles.

"What do you imply?" I shouted angrily.

But, with a stab of horrified understanding, it flashed upon me what their amusement implied. They thought I had fallen victim to the wiles of a confidence trickstress! I sank into my seat, appalled.

"But a girl like that!" I said. I was reluctant to believe the worst of her; I simply *could* not believe it. "If you'd only seen her, Raffles! Violet eyes, white dress, and —"

"Violet eyes?" He gave me an odd look. "Eyes of true violet are very rare, Bunny. I knew a girl once —" He broke off, turned to Ivor Kern. "Ivor, do you remember a clandestine client you had a couple of years ago — something of a nine-day wonder — a fellow the newspapers dubbed 'Jack of Diamonds'?"

"Phil Benedict," Kern said. "For about six months, he was the most sensational safe-cracker in London. He pulled off job after job, all on diamond merchants of Hatton Garden. I fenced some of the stuff for him. He was a young fellow, about twenty-two — perhaps a year or two younger than you, Raffles. Why, I remember introducing the two of you in the room over my antique shop — I even proposed that you join forces to do a

job on a certain safe that needed two pairs of hands. You both turned it down. Pick-and-choose amateurs, the pair of you. Gentlemen type. Same kind of background." The receiver smiled cynically. "Yes, Phil was a nine-day wonder, all right, then he just vanished. I wonder what happened to him?"

"He was a strange case," Raffles said. "In one respect only was he a criminal — he had a kink against Hatton Garden diamond merchants. I've often thought it was a significant that he was the son of a domineering tight-fisted father who not only was a domestic Caligula of the worst kind but a Hatton Garden diamond merchant!"

"How did *you* know that?" Kern asked.

"He told me," said Raffles. "I saw quite a bit of him after that first meeting at your place. In fact, I was best man at his wedding. That's all that happened to him — he got married. It seemed to me a rather quaint romance — and a rather touching one. He married a girl called Eugenie — Ginnie, he called her. Her background was — well, uncommon. There was a kind of essential innocence about Ginnie — a real innocence of heart — yet, you know, she'd been brought up by a guardian who had the whitest hair, the most frail and patrician face, the most courtly and beguiling manners of any confidence trickster in London. And he'd spared no pains, from her childhood up, in coaching her to one end — to excel in his own profession."

Excited, I opened my mouth to speak; but Raffles's grey eyes quelled me.

"When Ginnie and Phil got married," he said, "each of them took me aside in the vestry to confide to me, privately, that they were determined to go straight and to keep each other straight. Do you know, they were such a charming young couple, and so desperately in love and so earnest, that I'd have staked my life on their sincerity. They went abroad on their honeymoon, and that was the last I saw or heard of them. Ginnie's favourite colour was white. Her eyes were the only truly violet eyes I've ever seen." He looked at me grimly as he took a Sullivan from his cigarette case. "If Ginnie Benedict is now working adroit little confidence tricks round the London railway stations, it's the saddest news I've heard for a long time. What in the world can have happened to the two of them?"

I had never seen him so depressed. Though we were on our way to be the personal guests of the Governor of Gibraltar, we were a silent trio as we sat over our coffee in the Pompeian Lounge of the ship that night. Arms folded, Raffles stared unseeingly at his cup, faintly vibrant on its saucer to the throb of the engines below. I knew what he was brooding about, and so did Ivor Kern; but Kern grew impatient.

"Hang it all, Raffles," he burst out, at last, "all this gloom over a —"

He checked as a figure glided out

from behind a potted palm nearby. A white arm reached between us. Slim fingers placed on the table before me a neat, small tower of gold, and a voice said softly, "Your loan, Mr. Manders."

I gaped for an instant at the ten sovereigns, then looked up incredulously into eyes deeply violet, with dark, long lashes.

"Ginnie!" Raffles sprang to his feet. "Ginnie! *Why?*"

"May I sit down?" she said.

She took the chair he placed for her, glanced round as though to assure herself that there were no other passengers within earshot.

"A.J.," she said, then. "May I still call you A.J.? Phil always does. I had two reasons for what I did, A.J. One of them was to find out whether I altogether had lost the — the opportunism, the approach and timing taught to me by my guardian." She glanced at me. "I didn't know your name, Mr. Manders, until I asked your dining-room steward just now. But I saw you and A.J. walk on to the station platform this morning. Him, of course, I recognized at once. You passed my compartment together, then A.J. came back along the platform alone. I thought that probably he was going to the bookstall and that in his absence I'd just have time to — to make the little test of myself that I needed so very much to make."

She turned to Raffles.

"My second reason, A.J.," she said, "was to make yet another test — a test of *you*! You see, I thought that

Mr. Manders here, when he imagined he'd been victimized, would probably describe the — the harpy to you and that you might guess my identity. I wanted to watch you, see how you took it. I've *been* watching you — on deck this afternoon, in the dining-room just now, in this room here. I've been trying to read from your expression whether the thought that Ginnie Benedict had fallen so far from the high resolves she told you of, the day you were Phil's best man, weighed on you at all. I wanted to try to judge — oh, A.J.," she said, with sudden passion, "I wanted to know whether Phil and I really meant anything to you any more!"

Her hands, on the table, were tightly clasped. Raffles's brown hand-covered them. And he said gently, "It was that important, Ginnie?"

"Very, very important," she whispered, and I heard the tremor in her breath as she drew it in. "A.J., you knew, didn't you — you knew that just once, during that mad, spend-thrift Jack-of-Diamonds period in his life, Phil had a narrow escape from being caught red-handed and that he knew his face had been seen? Well, that was why, when we went to Rome for our honeymoon, we decided to stay there, out of England — for safety's sake. Truly, A.J., in Rome we went absolutely straight. And it was — well, hard at times. So few jobs for Phil, a foreigner, and all of them were dead-end and didn't last. When our baby, Philippa, was born, Phil said that we simply had to do better for

her, somehow. And about four months ago, by sheer luck, the chance of a good job in Capetown came his way. He jumped at it. He went off there, and was to have sent for us as soon as he was settled in. Instead — he's been arrested!"

"He met a diamond merchant," said Ivor Kern cynically, "and the old kink —"

She turned on him. "Yes, Mr. Kern, he *did* meet a diamond merchant. Or, rather, he was seen by one — the one from Hatton Garden who had seen the face of Jack of Diamonds! *That's* what happened, Mr. Kern — the man recognized Phil. He kept quiet at the time but, when he got back to London, he went to Scotland Yard. Oh, how discreetly they handled it! Not a word in the papers. What I know. I know from a letter Phil somehow was able to send me. At this moment, he's in the *Karoo Queen*, the sister ship of this one, being brought back to England by a Scotland Yard man."

The lamps in the Pompeian Lounge seemed to burn with an increased and sinister brightness. The cups vibrated slightly to the throb of the engines. Our own return bookings were in the *Karoo Queen*. I dared not look at Raffles.

"The moment I had the news," Ginnie said, "I left Philippa with the Italian family we were living with in Rome. I came to England. I booked in this ship as far as Gibraltar, using a false surname. I've booked back in the *Karoo Queen*. I shall be at least

near Phil for the last stage of his journey to — to ten or fifteen years behind bars. A lifetime! A.J., am I mad to dream of trying to use the — the wiles I was taught? Of using them to try to get Phil out of the hands of that Scotland Yard man long enough to jump overboard, to swim and swim and swim in the hope that by some miracle a fishing-boat will pick him up? Oh, it *is* mad — I know! But — I felt I had to do *something*! And then — A.J., when I was sitting in that train, thinking such wild thoughts, *you* walked onto the platform! If you knew how my heart leaped! Raffles, who stood by us at our wedding, and was the one man, the one cracksman, who might conceivably — if only he still cared enough to stand by us again — steal Phil back for me out of his prison on that ship!”

Raffles took a cigarette slowly from his case.

Ivor Kern leaned forward. “Ginnie, I’m sorry,” he said, “but, girl alive, face the facts! Gibraltar’s the last port of call for the ship Phil’s in. These ships, when they call there, stay twelve hours, no more. They don’t even dock dammit — they lie out in the bay. Phil’s certainly locked in the cells, deep down, below the waterline. As Jack of Diamonds, he was clever with locks, and elusive as a shadow; and you can bet your life, knowing what he knows about him, the Scotland Yard man will have an eye on the door of Phil’s cell every minute the ship’s at anchor, especially since it’s the last

port of call and Phil will be at his most desperate. What could Raffles do? He permits himself to carry no weapon, to use not the slightest violence. No, Ginnie, I’m sorry for you, but you must face it. Jack of Diamonds is beyond help — he’s in the box.”

Raffles was looking at the match he had just struck. I saw his eyes, with a sudden grey gleam in them, go for an instant to Ivor’s face, then return to contemplation of the match-flame. A queer half-smile came to his lips.

“As to that, Ivor,” he murmured, “we shall see . . .”

The day we passed Cape San Vicente, where the long Atlantic rollers broke in high-flung flashes of white against the rust-red cliffs of Portugal, I was standing beside Ginnie at the promenade-deck rail. Raffles was absent, having taken to spending much time getting himself shown about the nether regions of the ship.

I glanced uneasily at Ginnie. She was watching the passing headland and, such was her faith in Raffles, I knew that at this very moment she was seeing herself and Phil, with their child Philippa, making a safe, fresh start in some distant country. It worried me intensely, for in my heart I believed her vision to be more than a mirage. At that moment she turned her head and saw me looking at her. She smiled and put a hand impulsively on mine.

“Have you forgiven me the ten-pound trick, Bunny?” she said.

"Now, Ginnie!" I said. My heart ached for that girl.

But Raffles, that night, in the three-berth cabin we shared with Ivor Kern, said, "All that can be done for her up to the moment, Bunny, has been done. The ships being sister ships, I now have the geography and routine of both at my fingertips. I know the precise location of the cells and the strong-room, and —"

"The strong-room?" In my upper bunk, I heaved myself up on an elbow to get a better look at him.

"The *Karoo Queen*," he said, "will certainly be carrying South African gold and diamonds. The presence of plunder has a tactical relevance." Raffles was reclining in his bunk, a hand behind his head. Flicking ash from his cigarette, he glanced across at Kern. "Tell me again about this man in Gibraltar whom you mentioned, Ivor."

"Osmanazar?" Kern said. "As I told you, I don't know him personally; but I've heard of him, just as he'll have heard of me. He's the biggest handler of stolen property in the Western Mediterranean. He works under cover of a shop in Gibraltar called Osmanazar's Bazaar. I feel pretty sure he'll let me use some back room in his place to carry out the work you want done."

"So far, so good," Raffles said. "One thing bothers me a bit, because of its total unpredictability. You remember, Bunny? I mean 'the important personal service' which the Governor was good enough to say I was

'the very man' to carry out for him. There's a possible source of complication there. I wonder what His Excellency can want of me?"

The Governor was not at the dock in person — we had scarcely expected as much — when the tender chugged us ashore next day. In the noonday heat, the multi-hued flat-roofed houses which jostled in terraces up the the precipitous side of the Rock sweltered visibly. As we set foot on the wharf, a young officer approached us. He wore a pipe-clayed helmet, scarlet tunic, skin-tight bottle-green trousers strapped under the instep, and small silver spurs. His hand was outstretched.

"Raffles, welcome!" he exclaimed. "Delighted to see you. You remember me, at school? Yorick Hope-Jenyns. I was in old Motley's house. I got my colours from you in your last year as Captain of Cricket. And, Manders, old fellow — how *do* you do? This is simply capital! His Excellency has placed you both in my hands. I've good billets for you, and a very full programme." He glanced round. "Orderly!"

"Sir!"

While the brawny ranker took charge of our luggage, Raffles presented Yorick Hope-Jenyns to Ginnie, under the false surname she was using, and introduced Ivor Kern as Ginnie's uncle.

"Friends met on the ship, Yorick," Raffles explained. "I see you have a *gharri* here. You could perhaps suggest a suitable hotel for them, on our way to the billets?"

"Delighted," said Hope-Jenyns, with an ardent look at Ginnie. And as we set off at a spanking trot in the high-slung, yellow carriage with its red-tasselled white canopy, he continued to look frequently into Ginnie's eyes under the pretence of drawing her attention to such places of interest as the Casemates, the old Water Gate, and the Moorish Tower. "We are now going up Main Street," he presently announced. "Yonder is a shop, Miss Ginnie, where I must advise you always to beat them down if you give them your custom — Osmanazar's Bazaar."

Between the throngs of Garrison ladies in their bustled summer gowns, twirling parasols languidly as they sauntered by with their escorts in Navy white-and-gold and military scarlet, with here and there a kilt of Highland tartan, I glimpsed, through a doorway hung about with tarbushes, Moorish slippers, camel harness, children's sailor suits, castanets, and bull-fighter's hats, the shadowy, enigmatic interior of Osmanazar's Bazaar.

It looked as hot as an oven. And in the gala days that followed I did not envy that ingenious artificer in woods and metals, Ivor Kern, for I knew that the mysterious task Raffles had set him was keeping him occupied for long hours in some shuttered little room in Osmanazar's rear regions.

As for me, Raffles told me nothing, as usual. He and I shared good billets in Bombhouse Lane with some cricketers who included that graceful batsman, the young Jam-Sahib of Kush-

ghir, who had been at school with us. A non-player myself, I had no other task but the pleasant one of calling each morning for Ginnie at her hotel to escort her to the matches.

Twice we saw the Governor. Each time, it was on the parched brown cricket ground overlooked on one side by the high bastion lined with date-palms, and open on the other to the harbour dazzling with the brass-work and white awnings of the dreadnoughts at anchor, against the background of the bay and the distant white buildings of Algeciras on the Spanish side. The first time we saw the Governor was when he looked in at the pavilion for a moment to shake hands with Raffles and myself and bid us welcome.

"Don't forget, Raffles," he said, "I have an important job for you."

The second time we saw him was later in the week, as he was taking his seat to watch the cricket match in the company of the Port Admiral. He spotted me, where I stood beside Ginnie's deck-chair, and lifted a hand to us graciously. The game went well, but we were no nearer knowing what His Excellency had in store for Raffles; and as the golden days passed, and the nights brilliant with Balls aboard one or another of the dreadnoughts succeeded each other, I knew Raffles was getting more and more anxious. For each day brought the *Karoo Queen*, with its prisoner, closer to Gibraltar.

Before we knew where we were, the culminating night was upon us — the night of the Governor's Ball.

"And still we don't know what he wants done!" Raffles said grimly, as in full evening dress and opera-hats, scarlet-lined capes over our arms, we walked up the narrow Bombhouse Lane and turned left under the bracket lamp at the corner into the raucous uproar of the fleet at liberty in the grog-shops of Main Street.

Ginnie was waiting for us in the foyer of her hotel. She was a picture in white, a cape of lavender velvet over her arm, her hair smoothly raven, her shoulders ivory. The funereal Ivor Kern stood beside her chair. Raffles dissembled the anxiety I knew he felt, but he was brisk and kept his voice low as he said, "All ready, Ivor?"

"All ready," said the antique-dealer. "The *Karoo Queen's* been reported. She'll be in about midnight. She'll start discharging and taking in cargo as soon as she's anchored. Our box is already down at the cargo sheds. It's consigned as from a Mr. Pascarella to a London firm. Neither exists. The origin of the box will be quite untraceable. It's marked for the strong-room and will go out to the ship, in the first cargo lighter, as soon as the anchor's down. Osmanazar's arranged the other detail, as you asked, and the name of the man concerned is Ibañez. The *Karoo Queen* is due to sail again at noon tomorrow."

"Right," Raffles said. "We shall see you, then, Ivor, a bit before noon tomorrow, when you come out to the ship in the last passenger tender." He turned to the girl. "Now, Ginnie —"

"Yes, A.J.?" She was keyed to the

highest tension. In her shining eyes and quickened breathing was betrayed her excitement at the knowledge of how close the ship bearing her young husband now was, and how few miles of starlit sea still separated them.

"You know what you're to do?" Raffles said. "Tomorrow morning Ivor will take you to La Linea, the Spanish frontier, and put you on the diligence to Algeciras. From there you will take train to Madrid, go to the address you've been given, and wait there. Right? Then, as there may not be time for goodbyes later this evening —" He held out his hand. "Ginnie, my dear, godspeed."

She looked at him with her eyes of misted violet. She took his hand in both of hers, and pressed her lips to his.

Then we went to the Ball.

Only I, who knew so little else, knew the secret anxiety that gnawed at Raffles's mind, the anxiety which made him, under the chandeliers of that glittering ballroom, glance so frequently at the ramrod-backed, white-haired figure of the Governor, in his splendour of scarlet mess-jacket and decorations.

The Governor and his lady danced with this guest and with that. There was gaiety in the lilt of the violins. Ginnie waltzed in the arms of the Jam-Sahib. But I stood by the tall windows, open to the purple night where the palm-trees in the grounds were darkly silhouetted against the sky of stars, and I watched Raffles. He smiled as he talked to his dance part-

ner; he had, seemingly, not a care in the world. But he could not keep from glancing at the Governor.

It must have been nigh on midnight when, a dance ending, wide doors were flung open by footmen, disclosing in an adjoining room the silver and crystal of long buffet tables. It was the refreshment interval. A buzz of chatter arose. There was a drift away from the ballroom. The Governor beckoned to a person here, a person there; and, left as by a receding tide, there remained upon the shining floor a small group composed of the Governor himself, his lady, Ginnie, the Jam-Sahib, Raffles, and Hope-Jenyns.

The sultry thumping in my chest deepened. ~~The Governor said some-~~ thing to Hope-Jenyns, and the aide-de-camp went from the room. I had an uncomfortable feeling that I had no business to be here; but just then the Governor spotted me. He came across to me, where I stood by the windows, and the whole group followed.

"Ah, Manders, my friend," said the Governor, "you're in this, too, you know. The ladies as a very special privilege, but you fellows by right of having been at the old school." He rubbed his hands together briskly. "Now, where's young Hope-Jenyns? Ah, there you are, Yorick! You have it, I see. Put it on the window-seat."

The aide-de-camp placed on the window-seat a large box of polished walnut. That it was in some way connected with the task the Governor

had for Raffles, I could not doubt. My palms were moist. I dreaded what fatal complication this box might prove to be in Raffles's plans. I gritted my teeth as the Governor stroked the box affectionately.

"Any of you guess what this is?" he asked, smiling. "Or, why I consider that A. J. Raffles — and Yorick entirely agrees with me — is the very man to entrust with this important mission? What, no guesses? Very well!"

He threw back the hinged lid. On a lining of white satin lay a great gold cup.

"The Governor's Challenge Cup," said His Excellency, reading the engraved legend, "Presented to His Old-School, by the Governor of Gibraltar, as an Inter-House Cricket Trophy." Think that's all right? Such a trophy's been needed for a long time. Now, then, Raffles, I'm appointing you my Special Envoy, to deliver the Cup to the school, and read a bit of speech on my behalf, at the next Prizegiving. Give him the script, Yorick. Good. Well, Raffles, what do you say?"

With his invincible ease of manner, Raffles said just the right things, in just the right way. And I saw in his eyes, not only relief, but a dancing exultation, as he added, "And for the honour, Your Excellency, of acting as your personal envoy, I'm more grateful than I can possibly —"

His voice was drowned by the far-carrying, ominous note of a ship's siren. Ginnie's hands flew involun-

tarily to her throat. We all looked from the window — to see, moving in slowly across the dark waters of the bay below, the innumerable lighted portholes of the *Karoo Queen*.

The Governor now suggested that those of us who were sailing on the *Karoo Queen* might have some packing to do and wish to take our leave. Availing ourselves of his thoughtfulness, we escorted Ginnie back to her hotel, then hurried to our billets. Without bothering to change, we strapped up our luggage.

"A wonderful stroke of luck, Bunny!" Raffles exulted, patting the box containing the Cup. "The thing I dreaded most proves to be the best thing that could possibly have happened! The Cup gives us a better excuse than any of the half-dozen I'd invented to go aboard right away. More! I had a word with Yorick Hope-Jenyns. I told him I wouldn't know a minute's peace till I'd seen the Cup safely deposited in the ship's strong-room, and he's arranging for us to go out in Government House's own launch. So, instead of a hired bumboat, we'll be arriving in such style as will put us utterly above suspicion as regards — imminent events. Your bags ready? Good. There's a gharry waiting."

So it was that, as a small cargo lighter was drawing away from the liner's side an hour later, the stentorian hail of a Navy coxswain rang across the starlit water: "*Karoo Queen*, ahoy! Government House launch coming alongside!"

Stepping on deck as His Excellency's Envoy, in full evening dress, cape, and opera-hat, a Sullivan between his fingers, Raffles with his air of casual authority dimmed even the magnificence of Hope-Jenyns's scarlet and gold. And the Captain and the Purser, on being apprized of Raffles's requirements, personally conducted us to the strong-room to deposit the Governor's box. Shadows cast by the Purser's safety-lantern wheeled about the strong-room, with its rows of metal shelves lining reinforced bulkheads. Raffles glanced about him with tolerant interest.

"Quite a Golconda you have here," he remarked, with a smile.

"Golconda's right, sir," said the gratified Purser. "In the safe there, South African diamonds. In those small sacks on the shelves, gold dust. As for those small wooden boxes, their weight would surprise you — that's bar gold!"

But I could not take my own eyes from a much larger box, a black wooden box which stood in a corner and which I knew must just have been brought aboard from the lighter we had seen. For its front was labelled: *Porcelain & Benares Ware. Consigned by J. PASCARELLA, Gibraltar.*

"Well, Yorick," said Raffles, turning to Hope-Jenyns, "I think we'll see you off, and then — if the Purser, when he's secured his treasure-chamber here, will be good enough to send us a steward to show us to our cabin — speaking for myself, I shall be very ready to retire to my bunk."

But no sooner were we alone in our cabin than his whole manner changed.

"Now, then, Bunny!" He opened his cricket bag, fished out from among the bats and pads a coil of manila rope and a collection of curious metal objects attached to a ring. "Skeleton keys," he said. "What's known to the professional fraternity as 'a large, light bunch.' Ivor got them from Osmanazar for me. What time is it?"

My hands shook so that I scarcely could get out my half-hunter. "Quarter to two," I said, with parched lips.

"Three o'clock is the vital hour," said Raffles, "unless Ivor's computations are sadly astray. To be on the safe side, we'll get to our action stations now. Keep close behind me and watch the rear."

He opened the door a crack, peered out, stepped quickly from the cabin. The alleyway was deserted, dimly lit by the blue glimmer of the safety-lamps. About us was the uncanny silence of a ship at anchor, her engines stopped. Raffles moved with the swift certainty of a man who knew his way. Only twice were there checks in our descent into the depths of the vessel. One check was when we had to skirt on tiptoe a white-jacketed night steward dozing with folded arms on a laundry hamper in a break of the companion stairs; the other was when we had to duck into a recess to let the ship's corporal, on his rounds with lantern and truncheon, go past us.

Deeper still in the ship, we stole down an iron ladder into a narrow, faintly blue-lit alleyway. Just to the

left was a shallow recess in which hung red fire-buckets filled with sand. Ducking under the buckets, we had just room to stand upright, side by side, behind them. Obliquely ahead, along the alleyway on the right, were three iron doors with small grilles in them, showing them to be cells. Opposite them, from a door standing open, shone a rather stronger, yellowish light.

"The Scotland Yard man's observation post," Raffles breathed in my ear.

The man was alert. I heard the rustle of a newspaper. I saw a faint curl of smoke from that open door, could even smell shag tobacco. A glass clinked and I heard the glug-glug-glug of beer poured from a bottle. The slow thump in my chest measured the minutes. They stretched to eternity. For what we waited I had no notion. It was intensely hot. Perspiration poured from me. My eyes glazed, my mind wandered — to be brought sharply back by Raffles's iron grip on my arm. I held my breath, listened, heard running footsteps. They came closer, grew louder. Startlingly, they came clattering down the ladder.

"Sergeant Teemer!" A young ship's officer darted past our recess. "Detective-Sergeant Teemer!" he shouted.

A burly man, collarless, in shirt-sleeves but wearing both a leather belt and braces, lumbered out into the alleyway, a revolver clamped in one huge hand.

"Mr. Jessup!" he exclaimed. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"You're wanted at the strong-room

instantly!" Jessup seemed beside himself with excitement. "Captain's orders! Your prisoner's loose, Sergeant! He's slipped you! They have him cornered, by sheer luck, but he's armed and liable to start shooting any minute. Strong-room — fast as you can! Come *on*, man!"

The detective's jaw fell. He stammered, "Impossible! Slipped me? Armed? Not possible, Mr. Jessup! He's in the middle cell there — asleep!"

"Damnation, man," roared Jessup, "ain't I telling you the sly fox is in the strong-room? In among the boodle, his hands right in the perishing till! Purser heard something knocked over in the strong-room with the deuce of a clang. He got a lantern, unlocked the door, and strike me pink, there he was, in hat and cloak, with a revolver in his mitt! Your prisoner, Jack of Diamonds — Purser saw his face clear as day! Purser slammed the door on him before he could shoot, and cornered him in there!"

The detective shook the grille of the cell door. The door stood firm. He twisted his neck to peer through the grille, but this act got him into his own light, and there was a hint of panic in his voice as he roared, "*Benedict!*"

From the dark cell came nothing but utter silence.

The detective turned upon Jessup a face of utter consternation. "My keys," he said. "I'll get my keys — I'll get a lamp —"

"You'll get 'tarnation well hung," shouted Jessup, "if you dither about here while Jack of Diamonds starts shooting! He can only have got into the strong-room by cutting through one of the bulkheads somehow, and he may come out the same way any second — and come out with bullets! Come on, man, come *on!*"

Jessup darted away toward the ladder. The detective seemed to stand poised for a second in demoralized irresolution, then something broke in him and with a great shout he went thundering up the ladder after Jessup.

Instantly, Raffles ducked out from under the fire-buckets and stepped to the door of the cell. The skeleton keys were in his hand and as he went to work on the lock, he called sharply, "Phil?"

At once, a drawn, pale, handsome young face appeared behind the bars of the grille. "A. J.?" Phil Benedict said. "A. J. Raffles? Ye gods! I heard all that shouting. I listened. Last port of call — I thought Ginnie might have schemed some fantastic attempt. It seemed I was believed to be in the strong-room, so I ducked down behind the door here — out of sight —"

"Thank heaven for your quick wits," Raffles said. "I counted on 'em. The only way of getting you a message telling you to do just what you did was to make *them* shout it to you."

He jerked the door open. Phil Benedict, barefoot, in shirt and trousers, stood there blinking. Raffles thrust the coil of rope into his hand.

"Topside now, Phil," Raffles said,

"fast as you can go! Tie this rope to the rail, slide down it so that you enter the water without a splash. Swim straight for the lights of Algeciras on the Spanish side. Before you've gone far, a boat will pick you up. There's a man called Ibañez in it — a Spanish smuggler. He has clothes, disguise, and money for you, and will give you an address in Madrid where you'll find Ginnie waiting. Don't talk! Hook it! Goodbye forever, Jack of Diamonds. *And good luck, Phil!*"

With one swift handshake, Phil was gone, gone like a wraith, barefoot up the iron ladder, gripping the coil of rope. And by rapid stages, now walking fast along the dimly lit alleyways, now darting aside into brief concealment, Raffles and I regained our cabin. He hurled his hat onto the bunk, thrust his head from the open porthole, remained there for what seemed to me many minutes. At last, he turned, jerking loose the knot of his white tie, a grey gleam in his eyes.

"Clothes off and into our bunks quick, Bunny! I've dropped the skeleton keys into the water. No suspicion is likely to attach to the Governor's Envoy, but we'd better be in our bunks — just in case. Phil's well away, or we'd have heard a boat being lowered by now. They're probably still cordoning that strong-room, trying to decide whether to chance the odds and open the door."

"In heaven's name," I panted, as I tore off my clothes, "who have they got cornered in there?"

"Not 'who,' Bunny," he said, "but

'what'! The lid of the Pascarella box was held in place by a thin wire hook on the inside. The wire was treated with an acid, the corrosive action of which was carefully timed by Ivor. When the wire snapped, the lid shot back with a deuce of a clang. Up popped, on a powerful spring, a life-size dummy figure, cloaked and hatted, with a wax face fashioned in a pretty good likeness of Phil's, and a dummy revolver jutting from the cloak. Swaying a little on its spring, to the slight movement of the ship at anchor, it must have made, upon an alarmed and puzzled man seeing it suddenly among the shadows cast by his lantern, a pretty poignant impression! Remember Ivor's remark to Ginnie that Jack of Diamonds was caught — that he was in the box? For some reason, the fruitful thought crossed my mind that some might think it the proper place for a Jack — *in the box!*"

He turned out the lamp and in the darkness I heard him chuckling.

Yet when, in the sunset light of the following evening, we once more — homeward bound, this time — passed Cape San Vicente, and I stood with Raffles and Ivor Kern at the promenade-deck rail, we were all three strangely silent. Far inland, beyond the blue mountains of Portugal, lay Spain. And I knew that somewhere there, alone in a train bound for Madrid, Ginnie with her violet eyes, filled with an infinite anxiety and an infinite hope, must be gazing out at the fading sunset. And I wondered

how it would be for her, in the outcome — for Ginnie, and the husband and the child who were all her little world.

"They'll be all right," Raffles said. It was as though he had read my thought. And he said, "You know, Bunny, unredeemed sinner that I am, and seldom as I delve into such deep matters, there's something about Ginnie Benedict, the ex man-made confidence trick girl with the innocent heart, which makes me believe

that a certain plea will be remembered in her behalf — and, through her, in Phil's."

I glanced at him. He was gazing thoughtfully across the water at the distant white flashes where the long Atlantic rollers flung high their spray against the red cliffs of the lonely Cape.

"Plea?" I said, puzzled. "What plea?"

"'Forgive us our trespasses,' " said A. J. Raffles."

Author's Solution to The Sound Effects Murder

SYNOPSIS: Sound effects man Jerome Kirk was killed by someone who fired five shots. Two shots hit Kirk before he fell, two were fired into his back afterward, and one missed, smashing a whiskey and a soda bottle on a nearby liquor cabinet. The last person to admit being with Kirk, singer June Barlow, was seen leaving the building at two o'clock, and F.B.I. men — who were watching a bank robber in hiding across the street testify that no one entered or left the building from then until the discovery of the body. Police, however, found a radio and a tape recorder in the murder room, both in operation. And the tape bears a radio music program punctured at exactly 2:44 by the sound of five shots and the slam of a door.

When he hears this recording, Merlini says that Miss Barlow shot Kirk and then put on the recorder a tape which already bore the sound of shots. These, once the music was recorded on the same tape, made the murder appear to have

happened later — when Miss Barlow had an alibi. The clue, Merlini says, is "something that should be" on the tape — but isn't there.

SOLUTION: Merlini turned away from the tape recorder and crossed the room. "If June Barlow had been a better marksman she might have managed a perfect crime. But she taped five shots in advance because, as you said, Inspector, she couldn't know how many she would need. Under the circumstances I doubt if she even heard the commotion caused by the shot that missed Kirk."

Merlini stood by the fireplace looking down at the broken bottle on the liquor cabinet and the shattered pieces of the bottle that had smashed on the stone hearth. "Even a magician," he said, "would have trouble breaking all that glassware without making a sound. That's what was missing on the tape — the sound of breaking glass."

— CLAYTON RAWSON

BLACK MASK "SPECIAL"

Six months ago we received a letter from Steve Fisher which contained what we considered remarkable news — statistics so extraordinary that we take the liberty of passing them on to you, as an interesting item of information. Steve Fisher reminded us that we published his story titled "Goodbye Hannah" in the second issue of EQMM — back in the winter of 1941. Since that appearance in EQMM fourteen years ago, "Goodbye Hannah" has been bought and shown on TV (we don't know how many times) — but much more important, it has been reprinted in books and other magazines no less than fourteen times! An average of once every year since EQMM first printed the story in 1941!

And then Steve Fisher told us something else — in its own way, even more astonishing. Certainly it made us feel good — no, it did even more, it gave us a real glow — and especially it made us happy for all the authors we publish, both old "pros" and newcomers. In the October 1953 issue of EQMM we published Mr. Fisher's story titled "Day Never Came." Would you believe it, only three days after the October 1953 issue appeared on the newsstands, "Day Never Came" sold to TV! [Authors, please take notice!]

Now we bring you another story by Steve Fisher, and you will find that "Lucky Cop" has all the heart-pull and emotional impact that made "Goodbye Hannah" one of the most popular stories ever to appear in EQMM. [TV producers, please take notice!]

LUCKY COP

by STEVE FISHER

HE MOVED ACROSS THE SIDEWALK in the rain, and he was aware that something was wrong with him — though he could not tell what it was and he was not even sure when it had started. He kept wanting to be casual to prove it was only a mood. He saw a uniformed cop at the door of

the apartment and recognized him.

"Hello, Mike."

"Hello, Byron, you got this?"

"Sure," said Byron, "I got it. All the crummy little details." That sounded like him, he thought; that sounded like what they expected him to say. Now that he was a detective.

© 1939 by Steve Fisher

"Well, that's what you get when you're third class, Byron — all the routine details. But they'll be moving you up. They got you out of uniform fast enough, and you won't be long going to the top. You're a smart cop."

A lucky cop, you mean, Byron thought; I was in harness too, but they took me out of it and gave me a badge to carry around. Why don't you say what you mean? You guys hate me because I'm lucky.

What he replied was, "Well, it's better than sharpening pencils."

Then he was inside, going to the elevator, and there was no fooling himself now — he was on edge. He was ready to jump on people, even those who handed him bouquets. His fist was closed and he could feel his pulse beat in the palm of his hand. He could feel a heaviness in him it was impossible to shake. He rode to the fourth floor and got out.

There was a cop by the door of her apartment. This one didn't know him so well.

"Hello, Mr. Sykes. Ryan and Levine were here and left. O'Donnell came, but he didn't stay long. Nobody else has been inside."

"Fingerprint man been around?"

"No, sir. They figured there was time for that in the morning, since she's already confessed."

Byron nodded, opened the door.

"Rather a closed case, isn't it?" asked the cop.

"Yeah, closed," said Byron.

He was inside then, shutting the door behind him, so that he was alone

in her apartment. He was in the living room where Joel Martin had been found. Joel Martin had owned an important night club, so his dying was important.

He stood there, just the other side of the door, looking around. Rain spattered across the window opposite him, and in his nostrils there was the flat taste of stale cigar smoke; yet through it he seemed to be aware of her, of her perfume, her personality; the soft, fragrant odor of life that was Hope Miller. Her picture stood on the mantel. The place had been cleaned up a bit. The first-class men had already left, taking away the principal evidence: the gun, the cigarette butts, a broken watch, a morning tabloid. There was just the apartment, and little routine things still to be taken care of — everything material itemized, inspection of the floor and the walls — little routine details. Later, outside, he would begin talking to the people she had known. Not that they would contribute anything — he was just the echo who followed in the wake of an important case.

He moved to the mantel and stared at her picture. The hair did not show red, but he could see it that way; nor did her cheek bones look so high, nor her eyes so soft, as they actually were. He touched the frame of the picture, and saw that his hand trembled.

He remembered when he had seen her for the first time — in the Tombs just an hour ago. It had been the arraignment. She was beautifully

dressed — she looked like a show girl, all right; she stood very straight, and when she had spoken her voice had been soft and clear.

"Guilty," she said.

She had said that, and she had already signed her confession; no one had barked or screamed at her to get it. They were all very kind. A matron took her away. Byron Sykes had been standing there near the door as she passed. He had been so close he could have reached out and touched her, and he had noticed then that her face was pale. Behind the shining defiance in her eyes, he had seen fear. All his life he had been learning to detect things like that. It was that fear he remembered most sharply.

~~She hadn't seen him at all; she~~ hadn't even known he was there.

He went to work on the living room. He ripped up the carpet. He listed things in a notebook. He walked all around the room — nothing escaped him. Yet all the while there was a heaviness pressing in his lungs so that it was hard for him to breathe. He had never been so conscious that he was alone, nor of rain dribbling down a pane of glass.

He wanted to get out of the place where she had lived. But he couldn't get out — not yet.

He went into the bedroom last. He felt funny about it. He tried to be business-like so that he wouldn't give way to anything. He opened the door of her closet. He saw the gowns, the shoes; a sweater folded and put on the shelf. He kept trying to concen-

trate on what was routine detail, possibly evidence, but all that was in his mind was her soft voice:

"Mr. Martin arrived shortly after I came back from the club. I had sent for him."

"You had a quarrel?" the District Attorney had asked.

"Yes."

"What about?"

"A woman."

"What's her name?"

"It isn't necessary to involve her. Joel — Mr. Martin was very fond of her. I was jealous. I had this gun. I wanted to show him how serious I was. Well —"

"He tried to take the gun from you?"

"He intended to. He came toward me I told him to stay back, but he kept coming toward me. So I fired."

"No one heard the shot?"

"The walls are soundproof," she had said.

"Why didn't you call the police at once?"

"I didn't know that I wanted to — that is, at first. I didn't know very much of anything. Later I realized it was all I could do. So I called."

Byron Sykes rubbed his hand across his face. He sat on the bed and went through the drawer in the night-stand where her telephone stood. There was a small brown book — the names of friends, and their numbers. He saw a number scrawled on the inside cover. There was no regular Manhattan book in the apartment, and this was possibly a number she had got from

Information, and had marked down. He called it.

A dullish voice came on: "Grand Central Station. Information."

He hung up, stuck a cigarette in his mouth, and lit it. He walked over to the bedroom window and looked out. She had lived more in this room than in the other. He could feel her here, as though she were with him.

He tried to understand what it was about her that made him feel the way he did. Her glamor, maybe. He went to the dressing-table mirror and looked at himself. He was pale, too, and there was a queer brightness in his eyes. He was hard, but he was young, and he looked young. She was about his age, he guessed, but that was the only common ground between them. He was a local boy — public school in Manhattan, then Columbia University extension courses, finally police school. He had decided at the age of ten to become a cop and from that time on everything in his life had built toward that end. He had never seriously considered anything else: he took out girls now and then, but they had failed to hold his interest. Compared to this show girl, Hope Miller, he was a hick. He was just ordinary.

"And now crazy," he said to the mirror. "Now you're nuts."

He went down to the manager's office.

"I've got a couple of questions."

The manager shrugged. "Listen, mister, I've answered a million of them."

"All right," Byron snapped, "you'll hear a couple more. What kind of traffic did Hope Miller have coming in and out of here?"

"Traffic?"

"Friends, pal — you know what I mean. Did she ever have Joel Martin with her?"

"Well, I don't stand around looking to see who the tenants bring in. So, I didn't see him. But that doesn't prove he wasn't here."

Byron shoved back his hat. "Okay, did you ever notice *anyone*?"

"Yes. A girl friend. Young girl, about eighteen. The reason I remember her is that one of the elevator boys told me this girl was living here for about a week — with Hope Miller."

"Know who she was?"

"Another show girl, I guess. They often do that. One of them gets broke and the other will take her in till she gets a job."

Byron left.

The cop at the door was still there.

"Well, how'd it go?"

"Cold turkey."

He walked in the rain, not particularly conscious of it; his felt hat was crushed out of shape and water dripped from the brim onto his face. He walked, thinking only of the apartment, and then, in his mind's eye, putting her in it: doing the normal things of life, eating and sleeping, playing the radio, watching late television.

He stepped into a drugstore and phoned from a booth.

"There was a girl that lived with Hope Miller."

"Yeah, we know. She was the twist this Joel Martin was stuck on, and the reason for the fight. But she left a day before the murder, and Hope Miller's still good friends with her — anyway, she won't tell who she is or where we can find her. So far nobody knows this dame. Not that it matters so much, this case being like it is. You stick to what you're supposed to do and don't worry about any other angles."

When he came out of the drugstore he flagged a taxi. He knew he was trying to punch a hole in the best airtight confession Homicide had had for months. In ordinary circumstances ~~he could have seen things~~ clearly, weighed values, but now he didn't know whether he had a hunch or was just trying to prove he was lucky.

He went to the night club and had a look at her dressing room. They hadn't done much to it. The beaded gown she wore when she was under the spotlight still hung in the closet. Her cosmetics were on the dresser. He went through the drawers. There were matches and a half-empty pack of cigarettes. He picked a wilted orchid out of the wastebasket. He looked around, then he stuck it in his pocket. He found one of her professional portraits and thought of taking that too, but he didn't.

He went out and found the stage manager.

"Yeah," the manager said, "Mr.

Martin picked her up now and then, but there were other guys too. She didn't play favorites much. And she didn't hang around when her turn was done."

Byron went out.

He followed the routine circuit for the next two days and didn't dig up anything startling. Then they asked him to see a kid named Roger Harding who was merely one of the many names listed among her acquaintances. They didn't think Harding was important because he was younger than Hope, and she always picked older men. It was just that she'd known him.

"The Hardings are more social than rich since their crack-up on Wall Street," the first-class man had told him, "but they *have* got prestige, so go easy on the kid. When you get the report in on young Harding we'll probably take you off the case. Everything's pretty well sewed up against her. Only, of course, we'd like to find this girl that lived with her . . ."

So he went to see Roger Harding. The kid lived alone in an apartment. His folks were in the country.

He was a tall good-looking youngster with curly black hair, a pale face, and dark eyes. He was a chain smoker, and walked up and down, while a pop-eyed Boston bull sat on a silk cushion in one corner and blinked at the proceedings.

Byron went down the routine list of questions. Yes, Roger had known her — known her fairly well. He had always thought she was a fine girl.

No, he didn't know anything about the murder.

Then Byron thought about the Grand Central Station number scrawled in the brown book, and he went on his own for a moment. All his life people had said he was lucky the way things broke for him. So he played his luck now, stabbed out without knowing what he was talking about.

"This girl that left town on the train the night of the murder . . . how about her?"

"What girl?" Roger Harding took the cigarette out of his mouth.

"You know; the one you were sweet on." *Just luck*, Byron thought, *play it, ride it*. He could tell now that the boy knew something definite, the way he acted.

Harding laughed. "Oh, you mean Helen."

"Helen?"

"Helen Wood. Hope's known her for a long time. She goes to school in Virginia. Comes to New York only once in a while."

"I see. She's your girl?"

"I'm engaged to her, if that's what you mean."

Byron said, "Then of course you know what school she's in?"

Harding knew. Byron had bluffed over the first stumbling block, and it was all easy from there on in. This was the girl who had vanished. This was the girl the first-class men wanted to see. As if Hope Miller's confession wasn't enough, they had to build up more evidence against her: establish

motive sworn to by witnesses. This was the angle they wanted on the missing girl, and Byron had it now.

Only when he was on the street again he changed his mind about sending in the report. He'd gone this far alone, so he might as well go the rest of the way. He didn't know why, but he didn't want to hurt Hope Miller if he could help it.

They took him off the case, but he asked for two days' leave of absence and got them.

He flew to Virginia.

Helen Wood was very pretty, and sweet, yet adult-looking. She seemed more than her eighteen years. She didn't know anything of what had happened — hadn't heard of or read about the murder.

"It's about Joel Martin that I came," he said, and strictly speaking that was right. "We just want some facts about him, and we thought you could answer a few questions for us."

She laughed. "But what could I tell you?" She had red hair and delicate features; her skin was very soft.

Hope had red hair too, and looking at Helen, Byron said, "What's the connection between you and Hope Miller? You staying with her, and that stuff?"

For a moment she didn't answer, then she said, "Hope's my sister."

"Sister?"

She nodded. "Miller is only a stage name. But — well, Hope doesn't tell about us being related because — since our folks died a long time ago, she's sort of taken care of me, and she

wanted me to marry into a good family. She thought that her being a show girl might hurt my chances."

"Oh." Byron just looked at her.

"As for Mr. Martin, the night-club owner, he did take me around a little while I was in New York, but that was all Roger's fault."

"Roger Harding?"

"Yes . . . I'm engaged to him, but — well, sometimes he's such a little nut. He took me to Mr. Martin's gambling place, then deliberately left me alone. Mr. Martin noticed how embarrassed I was and offered to take me home. He said Roger had been drinking and wouldn't be leaving for hours."

"So you went with Martin?"

~~"Just to spite Roger, of course. I~~ had dinner with Mr. Martin the next day."

"Did you see Roger Harding again?"

"Yes. But he acted awfully funny. As though he were sick. He didn't seem to be interested in me any more. He took me out on my last night in New York, but then he got terribly drunk, and I left him. I went to my sister's club and told her I'd have to go to the station alone. You see, Hope had a show at midnight — just the time the train was pulling out."

"Did you see Martin again?"

"No. I went back to Hope's apartment and got my bag, then took a taxi to Grand Central."

"One more thing. Does your sister own a gun?"

"Yes. It belonged to my father.

She tells people she keeps it under her pillow. It's sort of a joke among our friends."

Byron nodded. "And did she know you were going around with Mr. Martin?"

Helen dropped her eyes. "Yes. She didn't like it." Then she laughed. "I remember she said, 'If I thought that man was bothering you, I would kill him!'"

Byron stuck a cold cigarette in his mouth and looked away . . .

On the train back he kept listening to the click of the wheels, and thinking of Hope the day she had made that confession. He kept telling himself it wasn't hunch any more, it was logic. Pure police logic. Any dumb rookie could see it now. He'd have to go to Joel Martin's club first, then to the apartment house where Hope had lived, and after that . . .

He went to the night club, then to the apartment house.

Now he was back to see Roger Harding. It was afternoon, and Harding was wearing slacks and a sports shirt. The Boston bull was chasing a rubber ball. Harding stirred himself a long drink, then flopped down in a chair and stretched out his legs.

"What is it this time?"

"I'm sorry to bother you," Byron said, "but I've got a couple of things to say. You can then judge for yourself whether I should have come to see you again or not."

Harding lit a cigarette, shook out the match.

Byron watched him, then he said,

"Look, I'll tell you how it is. Your folks are next to broke, and that night you gambled at Joel Martin's place and got in pretty deep."

"What night?" Harding jerked forward.

"The night you were with Helen Wood and left her alone so long Martin had to take her home. I was around and the boys told me all about it. You dropped nearly a hundred thousand dollars, didn't you?"

Harding rose. "What of it?"

"As I say, your folks lost their money on Wall Street and they couldn't pay off for you — you knew it was no good even asking them. Your father has already borrowed up to his neck to keep his business going. It was bad for you, because Joel Martin was tough. You'd heard of welshers that had got killed. You were scared to death Martin would have you bumped off. That's true, isn't it?"

"No!"

"I think it is. I think it depressed you, to put it mildly. You got desperate. Helen said you acted sick — You were sick all right. That last night she was here you had a date with her, but you got crocked. While you were high as a kite you got the idea you could kill Martin. It was either him or you, you figured."

Harding shook his head. "That isn't true!"

"No? Listen. You got the key to Hope Miller's apartment out of Helen's purse. How do I know? Because after I figured it out I asked the night clerk and he said that when

Helen came in she said she'd lost her key and they had to let her into the apartment. They didn't know her name, but they knew she was living there, so it was all right. Just a little everyday occurrence, but it fits."

"It doesn't prove murder."

"No. But this will. We would have known if anybody not belonging in the apartment house had entered around the murder time. We questioned the doorman and the elevator boys, but they didn't see anyone who didn't live in the building. So we would have known if you'd come in the regular way. But you didn't. I talked to Helen, and on the train back from Virginia I thought about it. You used the dog. This Boston bull. You came through the service entrance in the rear and went up in the delivery elevator. You claimed you didn't like taking the dog in the front way because he was so frisky he always jumped on people. Well, the guy in the service elevator doesn't know the tenants very well, so he didn't think anything about it. And since this was a crime somebody had already confessed to, nobody thought of asking him. Only I did, just a little while ago. He remembered you — and the bulldog. Both going in and coming out."

Roger Harding backed a little.

Byron unholstered the Police Positive and covered him.

"You knew Helen was leaving on the midnight train. So you told Martin to come up at twelve-thirty. You had plenty of time because Hope

wouldn't be through at the club until two. The way you got Martin to come up was by telling him Helen wanted to see him there alone. When he came, you were waiting. You knew where Hope kept her gun, and you had it. You shot him. You weren't so drunk that you forgot to wipe your prints off the gun. . . ."

"Listen," Harding whispered. "I wouldn't have let Hope get sentenced, honest. . . . It's just that women, they get acquitted on cases like these. But men haven't got a chance —"

Byron scowled. "Guys like you haven't a chance. And haven't guts, either. Look at Hope Miller. She thought that when her kid sister came home to get her bag, she'd met Martin and had some trouble. She thought Helen killed him. So she destroyed all other clues, and took the rap her-

self. She thought the kid had run off scared, and because she had always protected her, she was going to this time."

Byron got out his handcuffs.

He was standing on the shabby street outside the Tombs when she came out.

She was lovely. The afternoon sun filtered down through the dusty buildings and shone on her red hair; her face was aglow with smiles. She held herself straight. Newspaper cameras flashed. She walked across the sidewalk to the taxi.

She walked right past Byron, so close he could have reached out and touched her. But he was just a pale young man with a felt hat pushed back on his head, and she didn't even see him.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

and **Black Mask** section

Stanley Anton's "To Bury a Friend" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest. It is a sincere and straightforward example of the tough-sentimental school — the hardboiled species that originated in the golden era of Black Mask. The author was born and raised in New York, and "nurtured in New York's educational institutions." He saw a good deal of the world and very little of the war as an Army medic on various troopships. After service, he took a B.A. degree in Drama at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and since then has followed a Joseph's-coat pattern of odd-and-interesting jobs (the traditional apprenticeship for so many writers) — in Mr. Anton's case, as a filling station attendant, a publicity man, a theatrical reviewer, a producer, and an advertising representative. And now, after the war and college and sundry occupations, Mr. Anton has come to believe that "the best stories are found in bars, where the atmosphere is most conducive . . ." Well, we may not agree — but then again, we cannot conscientiously disagree.

TO BURY A FRIEND

by STANLEY ANTON

IT STARTED SIMPLY. IN MAMA Dukas's kitchen. She showed Danny the letter. It said Nick was dead. In Chicago. It was a police letter.

She was too old, she said. She had buried two sons and his father. Would he go?

And please, why did he die?

It looked like Nick wasn't going to beat her by much.

Danny went. It was an obligation.

The funeral parlor was dusty and old. Two rubber plants drooped their leaves in the gloom. *John's Funeral Home* in gold paint on the window, was flaking, but the display model casket in the window was shiny and the brass handles polished.

There was a man seated at the desk. He was plump and shiny in a blue serge suit. He rose to greet Danny, a questioning smile on his face.

"I want to bury a friend."

The face arranged itself into brisk sympathy.

"We must all go. May I extend my. . . ."

"Never mind. I want a decent burial and I don't want to pay an arm and a leg."

The plump man sat down behind his desk, and wiped perspiration off his face with a large embroidered handkerchief. "Of course. We can arrange one that will be suitable and dignified and within the ah . . . realm of finance," he said.

"Fine."

"Where may we pick up the, er . . . deceased?"

"At the city morgue."

He managed to look more distressed. ~~Danny filled out the necessary~~ forms and left.

The station house squatted between two tall tenements. It was faded red and grimy, and people kept going and coming through its wide, low door. At a desk behind a railed enclosure a uniformed man was pecking away at a typewriter. He was beefy, and his face and neck were red from the heat. Drops of perspiration ran down his nose and he wiped them off with an irritated flick of his hand. He pulled the form out of the machine and looked up at Danny.

Danny handed him the letter and waited.

The man read and asked, "You a relative?"

"Friend."

He said, "That would be Buchanan and Zimmerman. Have a seat and wait." He swung open the gate in the enclosure and disappeared down a narrow corridor. Danny sat down and waited.

Men in plainclothes and men in uniform kept going by. Citizens came in and made their complaints. The sweat rolled down Danny's back, and his seat felt wet.

After awhile he dozed. He awoke with a jerk when he realized that his name was being called. He went back to meet Detective Zimmerman.

Zimmerman was seated behind a littered desk in the cubicle. The walls were bare and cracked. A window looked out over a small tenement yard, ~~and Danny could see kids~~ playing.

The detective was a small, wiry man with stooping shoulders and a large head which was balding back from the sides. Dark eyes embedded deep in their sockets set off a sharp, hooked nose. There was a large angry-looking pimple along his jawbone and he kept fingering it. He looked to Danny like a man resigned to his job.

Zimmerman said, "Sit down," and looked at the letter. "What's your interest in this, Faber?"

"Nick was my friend. His mother asked me to take care of it."

"How long did you know Dukas?"

"About eight-ten years."

"Tell me."

Danny shrugged. "What's to tell? Haven't seen him in about two years."

Got my lung shot out in a Carny fight last year and I'm just starting to get around now. The last time I saw Nick, some place down in Indiana. We had a pitch there."

"He didn't write? Tell you what he was doing in Chicago?"

Danny looked out the window. "You never talk much about your business to other guys. . . . How did it happen?"

Zimmerman sorted through the papers on his desk looking for one. Danny heard the voices of the kids at play. One was crying now, in shrill high tones. A man came out in undershirt and soiled khaki pants and shouted at the kid to shut up. When she didn't, he slapped her and went back into the building.

Zimmerman found the paper he had been looking for. He scanned it, found the part he wanted, and started reading. "Shot, at extremely close range from back. Twice." He skipped some. "Twenty-two caliber." He looked up at Danny, "A woman?" then went back to his skip-and-read. "Deceased known to have been involved as front in various rackets. Possible reason for slaying. Living with man Harry Adler . . . dope addict. No known past record." He lay the paper down with a shrug.

"He was your friend, Faber, what would you say had happened?"

"This Adler. Who's he?"

"Came to Chicago from Cleveland about two years ago. Says he met Dukas at a party and they decided to move in together. I'd say he was a

little queer. What about your friend?"

Danny said, "Not that I ever knew."

"You taking care of the burial?"

"Yes."

"Well, keep in touch." The detective went back to his papers, and Danny sat there a moment longer. He looked out at the yard, and another kid was crying. He left.

The next day Danny buried Nick Dukas. He was the only mourner.

He stood with his hat in hand and a suitcase by his feet while a bored minister read the service. Dirt rattled onto the wood.

Later, he walked down State Street. He had forgotten how noisy Chicago was. Men kept going in and out of bars, and the women were just beginning to make their rounds. He hurried along, the suitcase banging against his calves. His chest hurt the worst it had in weeks, and he worried about that.

The apartment house was old. High ceilings made the three flights up a climb, and Danny felt winded. He used the key he had got from Zimmerman to open the door. It was different from anything he had expected. There were clocks. Dozens of them — all ornate, with pendulums swinging. All ticking their own rhythm. At one end of the stuffy room a big overstuffed couch faced the window. Danny couldn't see over the back of it.

He wandered aimlessly around the room, ending up by the couch. A small man with bloodless lips was ly-

ing there, breathing with a little wheeze that Danny hadn't heard because of the clocks.

He was a very thin man and the skin of his face was drawn tight over his cheek bones. Occasionally his body would jerk in his sleep, and he kept mumbling something that Danny couldn't make out.

Danny doubled up with a spasm of coughing and waited for it to pass. The noise woke the man. He leaped from the couch and scrambled for the door. When he realized that Danny wasn't going to bother him, he stopped and peered at him.

Danny asked, "Who are you?"

He perched on one foot uncertainly. "Harry." He snickered a little.

"Harry-Adler?"

"Harry . . . that's all. Harry." He came uncertainly back into the room and his courage came back with him. "Who do you think you are, busting in on a man's place like this! I'll call the cops . . . the cops. That's what I'll do!"

Then he forgot what he had said and started stumbling around the room.

His voice was thin and reedy. "Where's Nicky? Where's Nicky?" He kept brushing back the hair at his temple.

He turned anxiously to Danny, "What time is it, Mister? What's the time of day? I've got to wind the clocks. Nicky won't like it if they aren't running." He came up to Danny, grabbed the lapels of his jacket, leaned close to him and whis-

pered, "Nicky's particular about his clocks, Mister. Oh, he's very particular. But then he's a particular man. Isn't he, Mister . . . Mister?"

"Faber."

"Isn't he, Mister?" Harry giggled like a school girl.

It was the fall season and Chicago was damp and dreary, and Danny sat huddled on the couch feeling the dampness creep into his bones. He was weary, and his head was sagging on his neck. He laid his head on the arm-piece and closed his eyes. Harry's frantically erratic steps and mutterings came to him vaguely.

Danny began coughing again, and the pain of it doubled him up. He passed out.

He had been conscious of the murmuring for some time before he could focus on it. It was a woman's voice, husky and soft, and she was talking with Harry.

"But who is he?"

"A friend. A friend of Nick's. He buried Nick." Harry's voice became a sharp whisper, "But Nick'll come back. I know. His friend doesn't know. But I do . . ."

"Stop it, Harry. Nick's not coming back. He's dead. Please understand. He's dead."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you? That's what you came for. Oh, I know, you'd like that." Harry was mad. Danny heard steps and the slam of the bedroom door.

Danny tried to sit up too quickly. It hurt, and he put his head against

the back of the couch with a groan. She sat beside him. She had a rag that was damp and cool, and she wiped his face with it.

"How do you feel?"

"Dizzy."

"Don't you think you had better lie down?"

"It'll pass."

She made a gesture to the other part of the room, "Did you hear. . . ?"

"Yeh." He felt vaguely embarrassed.

"He's not like that. Really he's not. He and Nick were very close. . . ." She shrugged and looked out the window. "My name's Terry." She was twisting the rag between her fingers. Danny looked at her. It wasn't a pretty face. Her mouth was too wide, and the chin came to a point, but Danny thought she looked young and appealing.

"I'm Danny Faber," he said and smiled. "A friend of Nick's. His mother asked me to come up and settle what was to be settled." The dizziness became stronger and he lay down, propping his head on the arm.

She said, "I'm sorry. I should be doing something instead of making you talk. Would some food help?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you get some sleep or something? I'll see what I can scare up."

He closed his eyes gratefully. She started to walk away.

"Terry, where do you live?" He kept his eyes closed.

"On that couch." She sensed the

next question. "Harry's my husband." She went to the kitchen.

After a while Danny slept.

A knock at the door startled him awake. He heard Terry cry, "Don't, Harry," but Harry came running out of the kitchen to the door.

"Maybe it's Nick," he said. He threw the lock and swung the door open. There were two men. The one in front was tall and fat with a thick neck and a ponderous way of moving. He steadily pushed Harry back into the room.

He looked back over his shoulder at the gaunt, pale one. "We're in, John," he said.

John glanced over to Danny. His pale green eyes were flecked with excitement.

Terry came running out of the kitchen. "Harry, come back here. Don't. . . ." Then she saw the men and stopped abruptly.

John said, "Hello. We're back."

"What do you want?" She was sullen, "I told you we don't know anything about it."

"I'll bet Harry does, though." He put a hand on the back of Harry's neck. It looked like an affectionate gesture, but Harry screamed and tried to scramble away. John held him.

Terry yelled, "Leave him alone!" She clawed at John and he let go of Harry and swung at her with a closed fist. The blow glanced off her cheekbone and sent her sprawling.

John said, "Mike, keep her away from me."

Mike helped her up and brought

her over to the couch by Danny. She sat dazed. The skin under her eye and around her cheek was discoloring. Her hands were folded in her lap and she kept looking down at them. Danny touched her shoulder, and she shook off his hand angrily.

Harry screamed again. Terry flinched and started to get up, but Mike stood in front of her and pushed her back down. She moaned.

John said, "Where is it?"

Harry didn't know. He hung limp under the grasp and sobbed. "Nick'll fix you for this. Nick'll do that!"

Mike laughed, "Character! Nick's dead."

Harry writhed from John's grasp and started running toward Mike, but John tripped him. He slid on the floor and his head banged against the table leg. Terry stared at Danny, waiting. He felt trapped. He stood up suddenly and brushed past a surprised Mike. He saw Harry sprawled out on the floor crying, and it cut through Danny because he recognized its terror.

He was stopped by a gun in John's hand, the terrible personal knowledge of the feel of the slug chewing his lung away. The skin around John's eyes tightened in excitement.

"The money," John said.

Danny shifted his weight to his left foot and the gun swung up to him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

John kicked Harry in the side and said, "Get up. Get up!" but Harry lay sobbing.

Terry screamed, "Stop it! Stop!" and she looked at Danny in the middle of the room.

John ignored her screaming. "Come here!" Mike pulled her up by the wrists and dragged her, and she stood next to Danny looking at him . . . waiting. He could not look at her. Her husband was crawling around the floor.

John said, "Take them off."

"Listen!" Danny said, "What's that going to get you? She won't have the money on her!"

Mike slapped him lightly on the back of the head and said, "Shut up!"

Terry slowly pulled her blouse out of her skirt.

It was quiet in the room. Even Harry had stopped crying. Just the whirring and ticking of the clocks.

It didn't take long, and John said, "Tell me!" and when she didn't answer he slapped her on the chest and she gave a cry of pain and was silent. Harry started laughing uncontrollably.

Danny stepped forward and said, "You can't —" but John was on top of him. The gun barrel came down on the side of Danny's head and his knees gave away, landing him on all fours.

Mike looked bored. "We'd better get back. We've been away too long already." And John, his eyes returning to a focus of reality, answered, "Yeh." He looked at them and said, "We have to have it. Remember. We have to have it."

The door closed and the sound of it snapped Harry's laughter. Danny

stumbled against the table and pulled himself up hand over hand. He leaned, head down.

Terry said, "You can move now. They've gone," and there was contempt in her voice. She gathered her clothes in a heap and walked to the bedroom. He lay down on the couch, his head throbbing . . .

The clocks chimed the hours. Down below children were playing tag, and one was yelling, "Home free! Home free!" An automobile began blowing its horn. The clocks ticked.

There was a loud knock on the door. Danny sat up with a jerk. The knocker walked in.

A square man. Square in shoulder, square in hips and face. Deep lines creasing down from the corners of his mouth and eyes, a mustache penciled roughly in over his mouth. The eyes, from deep caves, stared at the blood on Danny's face.

He said, "I know where they are."

"Who are you?" said Danny.

"I'm Detective Buchanan, Zimmerman's partner. Want to know where they are?" He watched Danny, knowing he could use him. Buchanan knew how to maneuver people in the game; shake them up and wait for the right answers to come up. He was a good cop.

He repeated, "I know where they are."

"Where?"

"On the South Side." The cop wrote on a piece of paper and put it on the table. "Here."

He looked at Terry and Harry, then back at Danny. "They hurt you much?"

"Not so you can see it." Terry had her fists down on the table by the slip of paper, supporting herself and laughing.

Buchanan left.

Danny slowly put on his jacket, opened his suitcase, methodically took the .45 out of its wrappings, clip in and shell jacked into the chamber. Not thinking, the waiting over, moving as he had to, Buchanan pulling him, an old woman's face asking questions.

Danny in the middle.

Terry handed him the slip of paper and then reached over to straighten his tie with an angry flip. As he brought his hand up she turned away and stood there with her back to him and he left.

The night didn't help the heat. The sweat trickled down Danny's side and the shirt stuck to his back. His jacket covered the gun butt sticking out of his belt, the barrel pressing on his belly, making him walk stiffly.

A cab took him to the address on the South Side near the airport. Frame houses, once painted white, now gray with dirt, separated by strips of dirt and beer cans. Kids had knocked out the street light.

The cabbie said, "Want I should wait?" and Danny thought a minute and said, "No, never mind," and the cab pulled away. Danny wished the moon would dig a hole in a cloud.

He stood across the street from the house and looked at it. It was no dirtier than the rest. It had a porch, with a broken step leading up to it. The house was dark on the ground floor, but there was a light in a second floor window and every once in a while a figure would pass. It was John.

Danny waited till John had passed the window again. Then he broke across the street, trying to do it on his toes, but it sounded loud. He ran into the shadow between the houses and hugged the wall and waited for his chest to stop hurting. His breathing sounded loud, bouncing off the buildings.

He started inching along the wall toward the back. The gun worked itself up and fell out of his pants, and he grabbed it in midair above a pile of cans and junk. He shook, the sweat rolling down his face.

Below him he saw a cellar window, the kind you push in. Danny stooped and gave it a small shove and it moved a little, squeaking. He coaxed till it was back far enough for him to slide under. He landed with a thump on a dirt floor.

He waited.

The house wasn't quiet. He could hear rats moving, a radio playing. It must have been playing all the time. It sounded like a hillbilly band.

Someone came down the stairs from the top floor to the first. They were light steps and in a hurry. John? They went to the back of the house, where the kitchen probably was. A refrigerator door opened and closed,

and after a while the steps went upstairs again. A door closed. Where was Mike?

Danny pulled out a pencil flashlight and shone it around. It found the stairs and the door at the top. He took the gun out of his belt, snicked off the catch, and went up. At the top he put the light away, and listened. He wished he knew where Mike was. The hillbilly band was gone on the radio and something sweet with a lot of violins was playing. It didn't do anything for him. He figured he had been in the house a half-hour now.

It was time.

The door knob turned easily, and the latch clicked softly. The door moved. He stepped into a dark hallway, waited. Then turned toward the front of the house, where the stairs should be. Two arms whipped under his armpits and over his shoulders. Heavy hands locked behind his neck. Danny had found Mike.

His chin was on his chest. The pressure pain came down from his ears to the back of his neck. The blood was rushing black behind his eyes.

Danny went limp and the pressure let up slightly. He whipped his left foot behind Mike's right and fell backward, both of them falling, the hold broken.

Danny frantically tried to roll. But Mike caught him, hugging him around the chest, and the pain was terrible. . . . Slowly Danny brought the hand with the gun in it over his body and pointed it behind him. The blast was loud. He could feel the

bullet singeing his side. Mike jerked. The grip loosened and Danny squirmed around in it and the gun blasted again.

The big man's breathing was noisy, fighting. Blood came out of his mouth.

A door banged upstairs, and John came, yelling, "Did you get him, Mike?"

Danny's mouth grinned and he backed off into a shadow.

"Mike?"

More light filtered down now. Mike's face was dulling.

"Mike! Where are you? What happened?"

Mike died.

John was a worrier. He couldn't wait. He came edging down the stairs, a gun gripped in one hand, peering over the banister, trying to see into the darkness. A step at a time.

Danny inched under the stairs.

John was at the bottom of the steps now. He turned and saw his partner. Fear made his eyes roll. He stood in a half-crouch, trying to see into the shadows. Then he bolted for the front door.

John tried to jump off the porch, but his foot came down on the broken step, sending him sprawling, the gun flying out of his hand into the street. His scream was high and shrill like a woman's.

Danny moved up to him. The tic gave his mouth a wolf's grin. John lay whimpering, squirming with the pain.

"My foot. It's caught. Help me!"

His foot was held by the broken step at a crooked angle.

Danny said, "Answer me first."

John closed his eyes and moaned.

"All right, all right. But hurry."

"Why was Nick killed?"

"I don't know."

Danny set one foot on the step and put a little weight on it.

"Don't! Don't! I tell you I don't know why. Don't!" Sweat was running down his face. Danny took his weight off.

"You killed Nick."

"We didn't. Honest. We didn't!"

Danny started to shift his weight again.

"What did Nick have that you wanted so bad?"

John's eyes were ready to pop.

"Help me, please . . ."

"Tell me."

"It was money. A hundred thousand dollars. In hundred dollar bills. It was tied up in five packets, see. And Nick was the banker. . . . My leg is killing me!"

Danny said, "Keep going."

"It was a payment for a shipment. And he died before it was split. We had nothing against Nick. Honest. We were friends. But Nick died and the dough's gone, and the people we work for want it. He didn't have to die. Honest. He didn't have to."

"But he did."

"Help me now. I talked."

The porch creaked, and Danny whirled, gun up. Detective Buchanan stood there. Danny hadn't heard him.

They stared at each other.

Danny said, "Any more dirty work I can do for you?"

Buchanan looked back where Mike was, then at John. "You're doing fine."

Danny put the gun back into his belt.

"I can go?"

"Not too far. There's still some questions." Buchanan rolled a cigarette around his square mouth.

Danny looked down at John. He had stopped squirming.

"I don't have all the answers."

Buchanan bit too hard on the cigarette and it shredded. He picked the tobacco off his lip. "Zimmerman'll be here with a squad car. Want a lift?"

"No."

The climb up the stairs seemed longer. His wind was heavy and whistling.

The lights were still on, spilling from under the door. They hurt his eyes when he opened the door, and he stood there blinking. He saw the tall clocks first. The paneling had been smashed and the hollow insides gaped. Harry was in a chair facing the door and looking surprised. He had a woman's overnight bag cradled in his arms. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

The light was on in the other room, too, and Danny could hear Terry moving around.

He said, "Hello, Harry." Harry clutched the bag tighter. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

The sounds in the bedroom stopped. There was a dead spot, then he heard Terry running. She stopped when

she saw Danny and stood stiffly against the door. "Danny. Danny, I thought . . ."

Harry had got out of the chair. His eyes didn't look surprised any more. Danny nodded at the clocks with the splintered cabinets. He said, "You found it?"

Harry held the case tighter.

"Where were you going with it, Harry?"

Harry wet his lips. "I was going to take it away. Where it would be safe. So Nick wouldn't lose it. Me and Nick, we'd have a good time with the money." He screamed, "It's ours. Nobody else can have it. Mine and Nick's!"

Danny glanced at Terry. Her eyes were closed. She still leaned against the door.

He said, "Nick's not coming back any more. He's dead. Remember?"

"You lie! He's coming . . . Oh, he's smart, Nick is. He wouldn't let anyone know."

Danny walked over to the clocks on the mantelpiece.

"No, Harry. He's not coming back. Look, would I do something like this if I thought Nick was coming back?" He took down one of the clocks and dropped it on the floor. The wood split and parts of the mechanism fell out.

Harry cried, "No, don't!"

Danny threw another. "Or this?"

Harry clawed at him. Danny threw him aside and turned to Terry. "What about Nick? Where did he fit?"

Terry took a couple of steps into

the room and she stretched her arms out from her body, palms out.

"He wanted me. He wanted me to ditch Harry and go with him."

Harry made a noise like an animal. He was high and he rocked back and forth with the night case in his arms. Terry started to go to him. But Danny gripped her arm. She didn't struggle.

"Give me the bag now, Harry." Danny moved toward him.

"No." The trembling had stopped in Harry. The mind had pulled itself together enough to scurry around the trap. "No. It was Nick's, so it's mine now."

Danny moved closer. But he stopped. A small gun was in Harry's hand. A twenty-two.

"It's not yours, Harry," Danny said patiently. "Nick wanted Terry. So it's hers. It's not yours. Give it to me, Harry."

"She's lying." Harry was waving the gun at them. "We were friends!" His voice got confidential. "Nick didn't like women. He told me."

"You killed him because he wanted Terry. Didn't you?" Harry didn't answer. He started keening again. Danny took a cautious step. Terry darted between them and cried, "No!" and the gun went off and Terry spun around and sat down with a surprised look.

Harry dropped the bag and scuttled to the bathroom.

There was a shot as Danny hit the door:

Danny turned back. The bag had fallen open, the money spilled over the floor. Terry was crying. Blood was staining her dress on the right side below the rib cage. He didn't think there was too much damage.

"Lie down, I'll see how bad it is."

It wasn't bad. The slug had gone through.

"Where were you planning to go?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. Away. I didn't know Harry killed Nick."

The pounding at the door was impatient. He unlocked it and Buchanan and Zimmerman came in.

Danny said, "You ought to try getting some place on time."

Buchanan looked at Terry and the money and he asked, "Where's the big bad killer?"

Danny pointed.

The two detectives went into the bathroom. Zimmerman looked embarrassed.

Danny lit two cigarettes and brought Terry one. She took a deep drag and lay back closing her eyes. "It's all over now," she said.

But Danny said, "How do I tell Mrs. Dukas why Nick had to die?"

Later, it didn't bother him so much.

AUTHOR: **MELVILLE DAVISSON POST**

TITLE: ***Of More Value Than Sparrows***

TYPE: Legal Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Colonel Braxton

LOCALE: Old Virginia

COMMENTS: *Alas, there are too few tales of Uncle Abner, one of the truly great detectives of all time; but if there is one Virginian gentleman and scholar who could substitute for Uncle Abner, and do his name proud, it is Mr. Post's other great humanitarian, Colonel Braxton.*

COLONEL BRAXTON WAS PROFOUNDLY puzzled.

It was afternoon and he had made a considerable journey.

The house sat on a hill in a grove of trees, with only a path to reach it. The unused country road below ran through a forest to the little railway station at the distant end of the valley.

Colonel Braxton came up the path alone to the house.

Not a soul was to be seen, and opening an unlatched door on the portico he went in.

It was a library that he entered, a great room, the four walls of which were filled with books on open shelves to the height of a man's shoulder.

But no one had ever used it.

The man who built it by political accident had been a senator, and for appearance had filled this room with government reports, gathered at no cost, and of no interest to any living creature.

The earth had finally received him, and the later occupant had acquired the property at the sale that followed. He had made no change in the room, for no book intrigued him. He had permitted the volumes to remain, as one permits a permanent decoration in his house. No hand had ever removed a book from its shelf, and they became with time, like the beautiful walnut paneling above them, a part of the four walls.

There was a heavy, long, old walnut writing desk sitting near a window,

with a worn upholstered chair. This desk the late owner used for his papers and accounts.

Colonel Braxton had stopped beside this desk as he came in.

The drawers had been pulled out, and the contents left in confusion. In the partly open drawer below the writing desk, a big pistol of an early model was half concealed. Colonel Braxton took it up for a moment, and then replaced it. He touched nothing else and went on to the middle of the room. Here another thing caught his eye, and he remained unmoving, his hands behind him, his big shoulders thrown forward, his face fixed in concerned reflection.

He was profoundly puzzled.

Two things had happened on this morning in strange sequence:

A girl had come into his office and asked him to make this journey in the interest of her affairs, and then, just as he was setting out, a message had arrived from this same house, asking him to come at once.

There could be no collusion in these two events, as they were from opposing interests.

To Colonel Braxton their identity in time was the mere coincidence of chance. Another in the practice of the law might believe that opposing interests raced here for the option of his professional services. But in the obscurity that surrounded these events the colonel thought he saw the dim outline of a definite purpose.

The owner of the estate, Marshall Lurty, had been dead and buried ten

days. He had come here from New Orleans, bought this house and lands at the sale of the deceased senator's effects, and had maintained the outdoor, leisurely life of a country gentleman.

He lived alone. No relative appeared until death removed him; then came the brother and this girl, as though they had winged out of distant countries, with no knowledge that either was on the way.

Of his dead client Colonel Braxton had no foreknowledge. But of this brother he had got on occasion a suggestive hint. The colonel had been attorney for the dead man in some simple matters, had seen him now and then, and had been in this house. It was in the chance vagaries of the dead man's conversation that he had learned a little about the brother . . .

There was a slight sound, and, turning swiftly, Colonel Braxton saw the new occupant before him.

He had entered softly through the open doorway at the attorney's back. And at once, when one saw the man, one understood that method of approach — the instinct of caution, as though he were accustomed to subterranean maneuvers.

But, also, at the sight of him a doubt departed:

He was what he claimed to be, the dead man's brother. The likeness was unmistakable. Here was no imposter. But this man was sinister, as though he might have received the last heavy dregs of evil lying in the blood of his race.

He was big, like his dead brother; but he looked soft, like a mushroom fattened in tropic cellars — a poisonous mushroom! And Colonel Braxton remembered the hint in the dead man's talk — counselor to doubtful enterprises, cunning, untrustworthy, and dangerous.

The stranger addressed the attorney with a courteous introduction.

He was Caleb Lurty, whom doubtless his brother, Marshall Lurty, had mentioned. He was concerned in the settlement of the dead man's estate. He had sent for Colonel Braxton in order to make a certain inquiry. Would he be seated?

He crossed then to the big old walnut desk, and sat down behind it. Colonel Braxton replied with a conventional rejoinder, but remained standing, with his hands behind him.

Mr. Caleb Lurty seemed, for some moments, as though uncertain how the conversation should be opened.

Then he put this query: "Colonel Braxton," he said, "you have acted as attorney for my brother?"

"Yes."

"He has consulted with no other?"

"No other," replied Colonel Braxton.

The man gave a little whistling sigh. There came a certain resolution into his face.

"Then you can settle an important point."

He paused as though in reflection, and then got up.

"Pardon me a moment, sir," he said. "I will show you a daguerreotype

of my brother and myself taken together, as an evidence of my identity."

He went out, and in his absence Colonel Braxton moved toward the object on the wall that had caught his eye when he first entered the library. He was back in the middle of the room, however, when Lurty returned.

Paying scant attention to the old picture that Lurty had brought with him, he said, "I have no doubt of your identity. You are Caleb Lurty."

The man went back to his chair behind the desk. He seemed to gather himself together, as if to launch some pointed question. Then, as though the long habit of indirection prevailed, he turned obliquely.

"My brother doubtless spoke of me in discussing his affairs?"

"He mentioned you," replied Colonel Braxton.

"As his brother, the only member of his family living?"

"Among other things," replied the attorney, in a quiet drawl, "he also said that."

Mr. Caleb Lurty repeated three of those Delphic words softly to himself. . . . "Among other things! . . . Ah."

He hesitated, then went on: "You would know then that I am his sole heir at law."

"At law!" Colonel Braxton's voice went sharply up.

"Why, yes," the man repeated, "at law. It is by law that estates descend and are inherited. Does not Mr.

Jefferson's Statute of Descents name the heirs who inherit in their proper order? If a son dies unmarried, his entire estate goes to his *father*; if the father be not living, then it goes to the mother, brothers, and sisters equally; if the mother be also dead, and but one brother be alive, that brother takes. Do I not state the law correctly?"

"You state it like a judge," replied Colonel Braxton. "It is Mr. Jefferson's Statute of Descents, and I fear it gives the world a false idea of Virginia's value of a mother."

He turned about, his voice again in its lengthened drawl: "Upon what theory of justice, Mr. Lurty, could such a law be founded? In what manner is our paternal ancestor of greater value to us, that a child's estate should go to the father, while the mother who brought him into the world takes nothing?"

"Upon the theory, sir," said Mr. Caleb Lurty, "that the man made the fortune."

"Upon the theory, rather," replied Colonel Braxton, "that the man made the laws!"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked about the room.

"When I consider," he added, "how our paternal ancestors thus concerned themselves with such little, covert precautions in their own selfish interest, I am obliged to believe that any generous and noble impulses in us are inherited from the other side:

"Observe, sir, if you please, the injustice of these selfish laws that our

worthy fathers wrote down in their statutes. If the wife dies, the husband takes her whole estate; but if the husband dies, the wife takes only a third portion of his lands for her life. And it may happen, sir, that the foundation of the husband's fortune came to him as a marriage portion with his wife. Nevertheless, it passes on to others, and she gets but a third! In caring for himself, Mr. Caleb Lurty, our paternal ancestor, in his laws, neglected no precaution."

Colonel Braxton went on, his drawling voice sinking to a soft cadence: "And in a further instance: If a child were born out of wedlock, observe how our fathers, in their laws, got themselves clear of that. Such a child could not inherit their estates—they saw to that. It could inherit from its mother—they conceded this generous privilege. But the father's money and lands were exempt from such a claimant."

Again Colonel Braxton paused. Then he added a final sentence: "And so, Mr. Caleb Lurty, when you ask me if you are your brother's sole heir at law, I have repeated those legal words, 'at law!' That is to say, sir, if Marshall Lurty's estate is to pass by operation of law, it goes to you."

The man behind the long, heavy walnut desk sat back and looked at Colonel Braxton. He did not seem wholly relieved by this conclusive verdict. He reflected as upon a doubtful matter.

Finally he spoke: "You know about this child?"

"I do," replied Colonel Braxton.

The big pasty-colored creature leaned over and put his elbow on the table.

"It was a youthful indiscretion of my brother's. But there was no marriage. The eloping parties were too young; no court would grant them a license. The girl was sent to distant relatives and died at the daughter's birth. The child took the mother's name. It was never recognized in any legal manner by my brother. The thing was hushed, forgotten, dropped out of human knowledge."

Colonel Braxton interrupted.

"Precisely," he said. "Out of human knowledge."

Mr. Caleb Lurty looked up sharply.

"What do you mean, sir?"

Colonel Braxton made a vague gesture. His voice drawled in an idle monotony.

"I was thinking," he said, "of a knowledge somewhat larger — I was, in fact, thinking of a verse in the Gospel of St. Luke."

"The Gospel of St. Luke!" echoed Lurty. "What has the Gospel of St. Luke got to do with this?"

"It might have a good deal to do with it," replied Colonel Braxton. "A good deal to do with it before this thing is ended. Is not Marshall Lurty's daughter of more value than many sparrows?"

The big man behind the desk got up. He took a turn about his chair, replaced it, and sat down. In that instant he decided to face the thing he feared.

"Colonel Braxton," he said, "I have sent for you to inquire upon a certain point. Did you ever write out a form of will for my brother, Marshall Lurty?"

There was profound concern in the thick voice.

Colonel Braxton replied at once and with no equivocation.

"I did not," he said.

"Did my brother ever consult you about a will?"

"He did not."

"Or in any manner about the distribution of his estate at death?"

The questions were volleyed at the lawyer.

And again Colonel Braxton answered with his formula: "He did not."

Mr. Caleb Lurty relaxed, and for a moment his heavy body seemed to heap up in the chair as though de-vitalized. He was like one escaped out of a peril, and breathless from it. This was the thing he feared. This was the thing that alone concerned him. This was the reason for his message to the man before him. It was to make certain whether or not his brother's lawyer had any knowledge of a will! And now that he was certain, the pressure of fear lying on his back was lifted.

He was free!

He had hesitated before an irrevocable act, lest in this attorney's hands there might be collateral evidence. Counselor to doubtful enterprises, as the dead man had defined him, he was habituated to an excess of caution.

He knew that when an irrevocable act was done, it could not be undone. But when one knew, indirections could be given up. One could go forward with a decisive unconcern.

He now spoke sharply and with decision: "Then my brother's estate descends to me by operation of law, and I take it."

He got on his feet firmly, like a man ashore out of treacherous waters.

"And Marshall Lurty's daughter?" replied Colonel Braxton. "Shall she take nothing?"

There came an ugly sneer into the man's face.

"The law will give her nothing, and I will give her less!"

Colonel Braxton looked vaguely about the room.

"It is not the law that gives," he said. "The law permits one to take. It is the owner who gives."

"And am I not the one to take?" cried Mr. Caleb Lurty, in some heat.

"You are the heir, as the letter of the law reads," replied Colonel Braxton.

"And do I not take?"

"You take," replied the lawyer, "if your brother has not already given."

He paused; his eyes wandered about the room. His voice dropped to its leisurely drawl. He shifted his weight a little, like a man at ease.

"Mr. Caleb Lurty," he said, "it is a strange world. There is something behind it that is hard to fool. Human ingenuity moves with every sly precaution, and by some accident of chance, as it seems to us, the very

subtleties of these precautions trip us.

"Observe, sir, if you please, what has happened here. This morning Marshall Lurty's daughter came to me, and against all right, against all justice, against all honor, I was forced to say that she was not her father's heir, and that the law distributing the estate would give her nothing. But I undertook to see you, in the hope that you might be moved by humane considerations outside the law, and so at least divide your brother's property with his daughter. As I was setting out, your message reached me, and it cheered me, Mr. Caleb Lurty, for I reflected that perhaps you also were considering such an act of justice." His eyes moved slowly from Caleb Lurty's face to his feet. "When I looked you over I realized that this hope was foolish!"

He went on. The big putty-colored man standing behind the walnut desk neither moved nor spoke. His habit of caution held. He would hear, first, what this thing was that threatened.

"But what happened? . . . Look, sir, if you please, what happened."

The attorney's voice moved distinctly, although unhurried.

"When I entered this house, I was certain that your brother had died intestate. I had no knowledge of any existing will, and all my answers to your interrogations were precisely true. Marshall Lurty had never consulted me about the distribution of his estate, nor the form of any will, and no such testament had been lodged with me. And yet, Mr. Caleb

Lurty," his voice went up sharp and decisive on the words, "I now have such a paper in my possession: Marshall Lurty's will, written by himself, and bequeathing his estate, real and personal, to his daughter!"

And putting his hand into the bosom of his coat, he drew out a folded paper.

And for once — for a single instant in his cautious life — the man by the desk was toppled off his balance.

"You got it out of that book!" he cried.

Then, as though he caught swiftly at the words to get them back, he brought his hand up sharply over his open mouth. But the words were out. And Colonel Braxton repeated them in his even voice.

"Out of that book," he said, indicating one on a shelf before him. "I got it out of that book while you were absent seeking your confirmatory picture. And I have it properly in my possession, for I am named in the closing line as executor."

Colonel Braxton went on, unhurried, like one in a leisurely explanation of some ordinary and trivial event, while the other stood, his hand clenched over his open mouth, his eyes and face fixed in desperate introspection.

"Mr. Caleb Lurty," he said, "I have had some experience with men who contemplate a criminal act, and their precautions. And during our conversation I understand precisely what you had in mind. Only the fool destroys an important paper in the

moment that he finds it. A clever person, a cautious person, like yourself, takes no such chance. He conceals it, and sets about to discover what collateral evidences may lie about to indicate that such a paper exists. And so, when you found this will among your brother's papers, you concealed it in that book and sent for me, to discover what I knew, seeing that I was mentioned as the executor in it."

Colonel Braxton continued, while the man before him remained in an attitude of indecision.

"That was clever of you, for it might happen that I, as attorney for your brother, had some knowledge of this will, a copy of some notes, upon which a suit for the daughter could be founded, if the will did not turn up.

And it would be a wise precaution to learn beforehand precisely what you would have to face in such a suit. It would determine your defense and the advisability of some sort of compromise. And so you concealed the will in that book, and sent for me, before you burned it.

"In your extremity of caution, Mr. Caleb Lurty, you were thinking of a great many things. But there was *one* thing you did not think of." The colonel paused a moment as if to lend emphasis to the words that followed. "You did not think how a volume on this wall, if displaced, would indicate that fact by the disturbed dust on the shelf. Well, I thought of that, and when I saw it, knowing what you had in mind, I deemed it advisable to see why that particular volume among

all the others should have been disturbed."

And now the big, wavering creature came to a decision, as though the submerged desperado in him rose, scattering its disguises. Caleb Lurty's hand moved toward the half-open drawer in the desk before him. He looked the lawyer steadily in the face.

"You think, sir, that it was my plan to burn this paper. Well, I have changed my plan. . . . You shall burn it for me."

His voice was cold, measured, and exact.

"You will find a box of matches on the table before you. Strike one and hold the paper in the flame."

He brought his hand up from behind the desk, the big pistol gripped in his fingers, and, extending his arm, he pointed the weapon at the lawyer.

Colonel Braxton did not change his posture. His voice, when he spoke, maintained its leisurely drawl.

"Mr. Caleb Lurty," he said, "you have made one mistake that would get you in the penitentiary. . . . Will you make another that would get you hanged? . . . If you could not conceal this folded paper, how are you going to conceal the body of a dead man? When you have shot, sir, what are you going to do after that? If I am a peril to you living, think what a menace I will be to you when I am dead. . . . Think about that, sir. What are you going to do with the body? When you have fired, Mr. Caleb Lurty, you will have a dead man on your hands."

For answer, the man took a watch out of his pocket and put it on top of the desk before him.

"I will give you three minutes by the watch," he replied.

The long heavy barrel of the pistol remained leveled at the lawyer, the hammer back, Lurty's big finger on the trigger. The hand holding the weapon now rested on the desk top beside the watch, as for ease and for a steady aim. The menace was determined and deadly beyond question.

Colonel Braxton put the folded paper into his pocket and faced the man stooping over the desk.

"Mr. Caleb Lurty," he said, "since you give me this time of grace, I will use it in some suggestions for your benefit. The Commonwealth of Virginia will presently try you for this murder; and I cannot see a theory of defense. You are known to be here on this day in this house, and so no alibi would hold; no animus against your person could be shown in me, and so no plea of self-defense would stick. And all the vagaries of insanity would go to pieces before the definite and directing motive that moved you to the act. It will be a desperate case, sir, in its every feature."

Colonel Braxton paused, as in some reflection.

"There are only two men in Virginia who could possibly save you from the gallows, who could by any chance get you off with imprisonment for life, and I fear that you could bring neither to your aid. One is Mr. Wellington Monroe, and the other is

Judge Coleman Northcote: Mr. Wellington Monroe would not take the case of an assassin whom he believed guilty. And you would find, I think, Judge Coleman Northcote on the other side, for he has a persisting notion that I have been of some service in certain critical periods of his life."

There was a slight pause, and then he went on: "You might get old Fountain Dever. But his tears — and he depends on tears — would hardly move a jury in a case like this."

The lawyer seemed to consider the hard point.

"And yet," he said, "it will be a case to put the best among us on his mettle. You will have made so many conspicuous blunders in it."

The thick voice of the big creature behind the desk broke in: "You have one minute longer."

Colonel Braxton made a courteous gesture of acknowledgment.

"And I will use it, if you please, to point out one of those blunders to you. You imagine, sir, that I came here alone, and therefore there would be no witness to your act. But if you take a step beyond your desk and look out through an opening in the trees, you will see, at the foot of the hill, within an easy stone's throw, a carriage with a Negro driver, and a gentleman at leisure on the seat behind him reading a Richmond paper. That gentleman is Mr. Dabney Mason. He is no fearful person like myself! When he hears your shot, he will come up, and you will have him to kill. And after that, the Negro driver

will come up, and you must shoot him too, for you cannot permit an escaping witness to this affair. Thus, Mr. Caleb Lurty, once on the way, there will be no end to murder."

The trapped creature glanced sideways at the window, for he feared some trick. He started like one awakened from a dream. And the primordial brute that had emerged to dominate his will withdrew. He turned toward the window, leaving the weapon.

Colonel Braxton gave the beaten man no further notice. He walked past him to the door. But there, as he went out, he paused and addressed a final word to him:

"You gave me three minutes, sir," he said; "I will do better. I will give you ~~three hours — three hours to~~ cross the border of Virginia."

There came an iron vigor into his voice: "And I pledge you my word of honor, Mr. Caleb Lurty, that if I find you in this state tomorrow, I will promptly get you the three things that the acts of your abominable life have earned: a striped suit, a shaved head, and a seven-foot cell . . . all free, at no cost, sir, and with my distinguished compliments!"

In the carriage on the road below, Colonel Braxton related the incidents of the adventure to Dabney Mason. That gentleman was not astonished at the recovery of the purloined will, for he was accustomed to these spectacular successes in the affairs of this eccentric lawyer. But the peril in which the man had stood disturbed him.

"My friend," he said, "why did you go alone into this danger?"

"Danger!" echoed Colonel Braxton. "Why, Dabney, I was never in any danger!"

"In no danger!" cried the man. "The man might have killed you."

"Now, Dabney," replied Colonel Braxton, as in a soft reproach, "you must credit me with some rudiments of common sense. . . . Whenever I

see a deadly weapon accessible to fools or children, I unload it."

And opening his hand he disclosed the half-dozen cartridges he had taken from Caleb Lurty's weapon when, upon entering the room, he had paused for a moment beside the desk.

He balanced them thoughtfully in his hand, and then tossed them into the bushes by the roadside.

WINNERS IN "MERLINI AND THE SOUND EFFECTS MURDER" CONTEST

WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE (\$100)

Martha R. Weiser
Ames, Iowa

WINNERS OF ADDITIONAL PRIZES (\$5.00 EACH)

Paul Adelman, Palo Alto, Calif.; G. W. Howard Ahl, Malverne, N. Y.; Mrs. Michael Andors, Roslyn Hgts., N. Y.; James and Robert D. Athay, South Pasadena, Calif.; Howard S. Avery, Mahwah, N. J.; Mrs. H. E. Bartlett, Joseph, Ore.; Walter L. Benz, Flushing, N. Y.; Erin Berry, New York, N. Y.; Clare Burnham, New Milford, Conn.; Enrico G. Capriati, State College, Pa.; H. E. Cole, London, England; Gerald Feese, West Liberty, W. Va.; Christopher Fried, Brockton, Mass.; Grace Gregorson, Fargo, N. Dak.; Lenore Grunes, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. D. M. Henry, Willoughby, O.; Emmett Lafleur, Estherwood, La.; Joan C. Miller, Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. James O'Boyle, Bay Village, O.; S. M. Ostrow, Boulder, Colo.; Catherine E. Plumtree, Clinton, Ontario, Canada; W. B. Roulstone, Jr., Rockville, Conn.; C. Sanchez-Sierle, New York, N. Y.; Arthur Shapiro, Philadelphia, Pa.; Stanley A. Sowinski, Levittown, Pa.; Fred Stoffel, Beloit, Wisc.; Emil Tamm, St. Louis, Mo.; James C. Thomson, Chambersburg, Pa.; Mildred J. Thorstad, Great Falls, Mont.; Sally Wasserman, Arlington, Va.

NOTE: Many hundreds of correct solutions were received, and the judges had great difficulty in selecting the 31 clearest and most concise ones. The judges wish to extend their congratulations to those who were right and still did not win.

AUTHOR:

JOHN D. HESS

TITLE:

Banks Are Never Wrong

TYPE:

A Wicked Story

PROTAGONIST: Jebal Deeks

LOCALE:

Valley National Bank

COMMENTS:

Would you have thought that anyone could dream up a new wrinkle on "poltergeist" shenanigans in a modern, error-proof bank? Well, here it is — a perfectly delicious yarn!

LIKE MR. JEBAL DEEKS HIMSELF, THE Valley National Bank was neither small nor large. Again like Mr. Deeks, the Bank was most proper; no one had ever found any reason to suspect that either Deeks or the Bank was anything but dependable and perfectly, though dully, honest.

Deeks's career at the Bank had shown a creeping, labored progress. He began as a teller and was shifted from department to department, always a minor officer, always trusting a half-spoken promise that the Bank was giving him such a variety of experience to groom him for the critical job of cashier or perhaps the executive position of vice-president.

But, finally, after he had spent twenty-two years moving from the trust department to the loan depart-

ment to the savings department to the accounting department, Jebal Deeks came to believe that high office would never be his. The belief grew to disappointment, and disappointment grew to bitterness, and when Deeks entered his twenty-third year of service he was a dangerous man.

Halfway through his twenty-third year Deeks began to plot the ruin of the Bank.

He was a bachelor, and therefore had ample time to develop schemes that might cause chaos in the institution which continued to trust him as a stable-master trusts a docile old nag reserved for elderly women who have never been on a horse before.

Strangely enough, embezzlement did not occur to him until he had worked out and discarded twenty

other plans. Embezzlement would be a simpler matter. He had access to the vault, the books, the files, the cash drawers, all the hallowed and secret niches in the Bank's complex structure. On a carefully chosen day he could fill two suitcases with cash and negotiables, calmly walk out the front door, and thus perpetrate the only scandal in the long and honored history of the Valley National Bank.

As the plan developed he savored little mind-pictures of his superiors on the day his crime came to light. Mr. Rolfe, the cashier, would probably faint and might even have a heart attack. Mr. Elliott, the first vice-president, would rage and sputter helplessly and his breakdown of decorum would cause the second, third, and fourth vice-presidents to make rapid and violent gestures of reform and retaliation.

The news would soon reach Mr. Edward T. P. Fannington, PRESIDENT. Deeks always thought of the title in capital letters because that was the way the word was printed on the little wooden desk sign that separated Mr. Fannington from other mortals. When the embezzlement became known, Mr. Fannington, PRESIDENT, would have to call a special meeting of the board of directors, and over that meeting would preside the mysterious and never-present chairman, Colonel Vincent Sykes.

Colonel Sykes, whom Deeks had seen only seven times in all his years at the Bank, would doubtless bring

to bear all the icy dignity and monstrous authority that marked him as the city's first citizen, and the minutes of that particular meeting would probably never be entered into the annals of the Valley National Bank. It would be murderous.

Delicious as these thoughts were to him, Deeks finally abandoned the idea of embezzlement. He was not afraid that he would be caught and sent to jail; he expected that. He dropped his plans because he knew that, however skillfully he worked, he could not possibly arrange to be present when his wild deed wrought its effect on the Bank and the officers he sought to confound and destroy.

Once he walked out with his suitcases full of assets, he could never return. And, in a relatively short time, the insurance companies would make up the loss and the general public would consider the incident nothing but a bit of old gossip. Jebal Deeks and his one brilliant splurge of vengeance would subside and be forgotten.

Then, at church, of all places, Jebal Deeks found his Great Idea. The minister was delivering a pre-Christmas sermon on the text, "It is better to give than to receive." The text struck a chord deep within him; almost immediately he saw its usefulness. He spent that night in a turbulent fever of creative wickedness. By dawn the plot was defined, organized, and ready for execution.

Jebal Deeks would not *take* money from the bank — he would *give*!

On that very Monday he whipped into action.

Result: at 6:15 that evening John Berry, chief teller, was still working because his accounts did not balance.

He was \$4.71 over. Somehow the bank had taken in \$4.71 more than the total of the deposit slips.

On his way out (he had purposely invented some late work for himself) Deeks stopped by the table back of the cages, where John Berry was staring unhappily at piles of deposit slips.

"Trouble?" he asked Berry.

"Four-seventy-one over," Berry said.

"Hmm," Deeks commented.

"That's bad."

"Not good," Berry said. "Can't figure it."

"Better check those slips again," Deeks said.

"I've half a mind to take four-seventy-one from the till and let it go at that," Berry grumbled.

"The Valley," Deeks said righteously, "doesn't do things like that."

"Well," Berry asked sullenly, "just what would you do?"

"I'd check," Deeks told him, "and then I'd recheck."

"Um-hm."

"If you look long enough and hard enough you can always find an error in arithmetic," Deeks said. "If I've learned anything in my twenty-three years here, that's it."

That evening Deeks bought himself a steak dinner. He waited two weeks before he made another small gift to

the bank, and this time he raised himself from \$4.71 to \$6.38, and Berry kept all four tellers after hours.

Six days later he went up to \$11.60 and Berry felt obliged to report the discrepancy to Mr. Rolfe, the cashier. Mr. Rolfe spent all the next day examining the methods and procedures followed by the tellers in taking in and accounting for the money that passed over their counters.

That afternoon Deeks left early and for the first time in his life had a suit made to order.

For four months Deeks continued his assault on the Bank. At the end of that time there were circles under Berry's eyes, a teller had been transferred to the Bank's branch in Fairview, Mr. Rolfe was spending almost all his time watching the cages, and the Bank had ordered a special audit by an outside accounting firm.

Deeks estimated that this special audit would cost the Bank between three and four hundred dollars. That afternoon he ordered a table-model television set sent to his sister in California.

Soon after the audit was completed a stranger came to the Bank and was introduced to the staff as Mr. Bricklow. The staff was instructed to cooperate fully with Mr. Bricklow, and it quickly got around that Mr. Bricklow was a representative of Hermann, Struckle, and Foist, a well-known firm of management engineers.

Cautious investigation revealed that Mr. Rolfe, the cashier, had

one day gone to the office of Mr. Elliott, the first vice-president, and solemnly announced that something was drastically wrong with the efficiency standards of the Bank — at the so-called working level only, of course — and that he was damned if he knew where the trouble was. Mr. Rolfe had taken this news to Mr. Edward T. P. Fannington, PRESIDENT, and Mr. Fannington, who had got where he was because he made decisions on his own and acted on them without shilly-shallying, had called Hermann, Struckle, and Foist.

Hermann, Struckle, and Foist had listened to the problem and announced that the immediate difficulty was "more symptomatic than self-contained." They had recommended a thorough management and operational survey, which their firm was prepared to make for the sum of \$12,000. When Jebal Deeks heard this figure he moved out of the rooming house in which he had lived for nearly twenty years and rented a modern three-room apartment on fashionable Elmhurst Street. And he had the inspiration to broaden and enrich his scheme with entirely new tactics.

Deeks was assigned to Mr. Bricklow as the Bank's man, the inside man who knew more about the "working level" than anyone else, and for three months he labored with a new diligence to accommodate Mr. Bricklow and the two "engineers" who were soon brought in to "get to the bottom of this thing."

The strange discrepancies continued, however, and Deeks saw to it that the discrepancies were not limited to simple overages in the tellers' daily accounts.

Mr. Bricklow one day pointed out to Deeks that the filing cabinet labeled *Small loans: 1936-1938* actually contained mortgage papers for 1932-1934.

"How did you people get yourselves into this mess?" Mr. Bricklow asked, appalled.

"I suppose we were just getting a little smug and rusty," Deeks said, and he suggested that he would search the files himself for errors.

Mr. Bricklow accepted the suggestion, and Deeks went to work. He found quite a few things wrong with the filing system.

Then one of Mr. Bricklow's assistants discovered that, through a clerical error which no one seemed able to trace, one of the guards had received one weekly pay check equal to that received by the PRESIDENT and had quietly cashed the check. The guard was discharged, of course, but the incident went into Mr. Bricklow's notebook, where it was sidemarked, with a notation *N.B.!* in the margin.

One day, while Hermann, Struckle, and Foist's engineers were busy in the back room, Mr. Fannington, PRESIDENT, received a telephone call from his old friend, Mr. Blackstone, president of the Blackstone Manufacturing Company, the city's second biggest industrial concern.

Mr. Blackstone kidded Mr. Fannington without mercy, playing fifteen variations on a single joke. The joke was that the Blackstone Manufacturing Company had received a monthly account statement, properly addressed to Blackstone by the Bank, which contained the balance sheet of a private individual named Kackel. Kackel had written eleven checks that month, six of them to his local liquor store.

Mr. Blackstone was uproariously jocular, and told Mr. Fannington that he wasn't mad about it, just wondering if Kackel, when he opened the statement that came to *him*, had rushed out and written another great *big* check to his liquor store. After Mr. Fannington hung up he went directly to Mr. Bricklow and asked him when the hell he was going to finish his survey; if he didn't finish soon the whole damn Bank might collapse in a rubble heap at their feet.

Deeks had never heard Mr. Fannington swear. It was a juicy plum to add to the sweet fruits of his efforts.

Three months after Mr. Bricklow had completed his field work the report arrived, beautifully bound in black leather, with gold letters stamped on the cover. The letters announced a *Management Survey Conducted by Hermann, Struckle, and Foist in Behalf of the Valley National Bank*. They also announced, in the largest letters of all, that the report was **CONFIDENTIAL**.

While the report was being written to its full 316 pages, complete with

charts, graphs, and tables, matters worsened at the Bank, and when the book arrived Mr. Fannington read it through in one evening. He then sent his copy to Colonel Sykes, adding a note: "This is rough stuff, but we might as well face the facts."

A special meeting of the board of directors was called for the following Tuesday. Hermann, Struckle, and Foist hadn't minced any words.

The Valley National Bank, they wrote, was operating on archaic management principles. Fortunately, the fundamental problems had been faced in time, and so far the trouble was only "symptomatic" — a word they used nearly a hundred times in the report. However, if the Bank wished to avoid graver consequences, many, many changes would be required.

Among the changes were:

1. *A re-facing of the exterior of the Bank building and a complete renovation of the interior. Twenty pages of reasons followed this recommendation.*
2. *The elimination of the post now held by the third vice-president.*
3. *The replacement of the individual now occupying the post of first vice-president. (This suggestion was why the report was considered sufficiently confidential to be kept from Mr. Elliott, the first vice-president.)*
4. *The installation of a completely new records system operated by highly skilled (and expensive) persons using automatic (and expensive) equipment.*
5. *The inauguration of an institutional advertising campaign to reinvigorate public confidence.*

The engineers piled reform on reform and expense on expense until, toward the end of the report, they estimated the total cost of the operation at nearly a quarter of a million dollars. However, they said, the Bank would save five times that sum over a period of ten years if they faced the issue and took immediate action.

On the closing page, the engineers paid tribute to the fine cooperation they had received from the Bank's personnel. And, while everyone had been helpful, they wished especially to comment on the unflagging assistance of Mr. Jebal Deeks, whose splendid knowledge of the Bank's many and complex departments had been of inestimable value to them.

Because he had been the Bank's inside man on the job, Deeks knew exactly what the report would say. He also knew, because Mr. Bricklow had told him, that he would get a special note of praise on the last page. So it was no surprise to him when he was told he would be called into the Special Meeting of the board of directors on Tuesday.

He was told he would be asked to give his views on the situation as well as certain specific information, and that he should plan to be present at the meeting from 2:20 to 2:40, at which time, unless he was requested to stay, he would automatically leave.

Up to this moment Jebal Deeks's wickedness had struck straight and true toward its ultimate goal. But at 2:10, just ten minutes before he was to be admitted to the solemn meeting,

Deeks allowed the wheel to spin out of his hands and his scheme shot off in a new direction.

While he sat calmly on a green leather chair, awaiting his call, it came to him that he now had a chance to achieve what he had always wanted to achieve — a position of authority, a title, and the recognition due him after so many years of superior service.

He became so convinced of this future that, when he was finally asked to enter the meeting room, he lit a cigar and walked in calmly puffing it, as if he were the chairman of the board.

"Deeks," Mr. Fannington said, "we asked Mr. Bricklow to absent himself during your interview. The colonel would like some uninhibited discussion of Bricklow's methods in making up his report."

"That's very wise of the colonel," Deeks said, nodding his head and narrowing his eyes.

The colonel sat up stiffly — and began, "First of all, Deeks —"

"Before you ask any questions," Deeks interrupted, "let me say that I am acquainted with the contents of the report, and, with all due respect, it is my opinion that the wool is being pulled over your eyes."

There was a clearing of throats, but Deeks did not heed it.

"Colonel," he said, pointing a finger at the chairman's forehead, "You play golf, don't you?"

"Yes."

"When you lose a ball in the rough,

Colonel, do you rush to the clubhouse and sign up for some expensive lessons with the pro?"

"Why . . . ahh . . . no."

"And you, Mr. Fannington, you play poker, don't you?"

"Now and then," the PRESIDENT said.

"If you have a run of bad luck, do you hurry out to buy a new card table?"

"No . . . but . . ."

"Gentlemen!" Deeks said, and for the first time in his life he slammed his fist on a table, "I ask you *not* to be stampeded into this thing."

More throats were cleared, more fingers were drummed on the table, and more glances were exchanged:

"What are you suggesting, Deeks?" the colonel asked.

Deeks's proposal was forthright and simple. He explained that he had followed every step of the Hermann, Struckle, and Foist investigation. It was the first time in his twenty-three years at the Bank that he had compared the work of the many departments in which he had served, and, while he didn't wish to disparage the integrity of Hermann, Struckle, and Foist, it was nevertheless his objective opinion that he knew a great deal more about the Bank than Hermann or Struckle or Foist — or Bricklow.

"It is my belief, gentlemen," Deeks said, "that the Valley National is as soundly run a bank as any in the country. It was sound before Bricklow, it was sound during Bricklow, and it is sound now."

Colonel Sykes nodded and turned to the PRESIDENT. "Can you deny that?" he asked.

"In an operation this size," Deeks continued, "a few frayed ends poke out and give the casual observer an impression of *general* shabbiness. But this Bank is *not* shabby."

"Hardly," said Colonel Sykes.

"On the other hand," Deeks said lowering his voice, "even a few frayed ends are inexcusable. So I say that, instead of reorganizing, instead of putting up a new façade, instead of dismissing valuable officers, instead of cluttering ourselves with unnecessary machinery, instead of humiliating ourselves with advertising campaigns, we should pick up broom and dust-cloth and clean-house in our own way and with our own tools!"

"Please elaborate," the colonel said.

"If you will give me one month, gentlemen, I promise I will do more to abolish these signs of inefficiency than a new set of front pillars would do in five years."

A week later a new office was created. The title was *Director of Procedure*, and the job, with a 20 per cent increase in salary, fell to Jebal Deeks.

He installed a new tallying system for the tellers, and in no time at all the maddening clerical discrepancies disappeared. He hired two new filing clerks and fired one stenographer, and at the end of a month he was able to report the files were without error and would remain without error. He invented a double-checking plan

to insure that there would be no recurrence of the embarrassing Blackstone Manufacturing Company-Mr. Kackel incident.

He swept and dusted the procedural machinery of the Valley National Bank with such thoroughness and skill that he soon became known, behind his back as "The Watchdog." Nobody mentioned the end of the month he had requested to put the Bank in order, and at the end of a year, at the regular board meeting, Colonel Sykes personally recommended that Deeks receive another 10 per cent increase in salary.

The next year the title *Director of Procedure* was dropped and Jebal Deeks was made fifth vice-president. Two years later, after the sad passing of Mr. Elliott, Colonel Sykes and Mr. Fannington invited him to a private lunch and told him they were putting him up for membership in the Century Club. Colonel Sykes then smiled and slyly said that his chances of acceptance into the club would be greatly improved if he were first vice-president instead of fifth.

Deeks made an excellent first vice-president, and around the Bank it was believed that when Mr. Fannington stepped down, within the clearly foreseeable future, "The Watchdog" would become PRESIDENT.

The dean of the local business school, who made it a point to keep abreast of such matters, called Deeks one day and asked if Jeb would be kind enough to let the school's banking class spend a day at the bank.

"I want 'em to see how a first-rate house is run," the dean said, "and I can't think of anybody better to tell 'em than the next president of the Valley."

Deeks laughed and made an appointment for the boys. At his regular afternoon conference with Mr. Fannington he reported the dean's request.

"Jeb," Mr. Fannington said, "I'd like to sit in on that schoolboy interview myself. Many a time I've wondered exactly what it was that shot you so far ahead."

Deeks shrugged. "Anybody who puts his mind to it could do the trick," he said.

And, he thought later, that statement was entirely true. His scheme had been foolproof. He could have gone on for an unlimited time, casually disrupting the Bank's innermost gears, slowly increasing the scope of his sabotage. So long as he was reasonably careful nobody could possibly catch him. It was a brilliant scheme, and it would inevitably have destroyed the Bank.

Fortunately for the Bank, he'd had the vision to convert the scheme to his own permanent and respectable advantage. Another man might not have been *that* clever.

Mr. Fannington broke in on these thoughts. "Jeb," he said, "how old are you?"

"Fifty-seven."

"I'm only sixty-two," the PRESIDENT said, "but I had a check-up a few weeks ago. I might as well admit

it: the doctor tells me it's time to quit."

"You're joking," Deeks said.

"No. I'm not. The old ticker." He patted his breast. "But let's not go into it. I tell you, Jeb, because I'm going to recommend to the board that you step into my shoes."

"That's — that's — what can I say, Mr. Fannington?"

"Don't say anything. But get a check-up yourself. Before I throw you to the wolves, I want to be sure you're in top shape. Physically, I mean. I know now what a —" he patted his chest again — "thing like this can do to a man's business worth."

"I'll do it, of course."

Deeks did. He spent a whole morning in the doctor's office. He expected to return for more tests in the afternoon, and made only one appointment for the day — the talk to the students from the business school. He planned to speak to them briefly about the virtues of efficiency, relentless and spotless no-margin-for-error efficiency, as the backbone of a good banking operation; then he would turn them over to Wardell, the new chief teller.

He sent for Wardell to explain the visit. Wardell listened respectfully, nodded his head several times, and then turned to go. At the door he stopped.

"Mr. Deeks," he said.

"Yes, Wardell?"

"You've been so busy lately I've hesitated to ask to see you."

"What about?"

"Well, sir, in the last two or three months — and I just can't account for it — I've spent night after night working overtime . . ."

Deeks's stomach tightened. A sharp pain told him he had just bit his tongue.

"Yes?" he said.

"I wouldn't bother you, Mr. Deeks, except that I think this is — well — symptomatic of some pretty basic troubles."

"What is?"

"Well, in the last months something's gone badly wrong with our tallying system. We've got regular discrepancies between the deposit slip figures and the money actually deposited."

Deeks felt dizzy.

"It just isn't traceable, Mr. Deeks. We can't find anything that points —"

"Never mind!" Deeks said. "I'll talk to you about it later."

"Yes, sir," Wardell said, and he left.

Deeks leaned his head on his hand, and tried to straighten out his mind. But he could only straighten it to the first really big kink: "Whoever it is, he can't be caught; whoever it is, he can't be stopped."

He pushed the buzzer for his secretary.

"Yes, sir?" she said at the door.

"When those schoolboys come," he said, "send them right to Mr. Wardell. I can't see them today."

"But, Mr. Deeks," she said, "you called the whole thing off yesterday."

"I did?"

"Yes sir. Here . . . just a second."

She disappeared for a moment, and came back with the appointment calendar. She set it down before him and put her finger on the 1:30 line. *Dean Nelson's banking students* had been crossed out, and over the black line was written, in a scrawl that might or might not have been his, *Please cancel. J. D.*

"So I called the dean, of course," the secretary said. "He tried to be nice about it, but I could tell he was miffed. If you don't mind my suggesting it, Mr. Deeks, a nice letter —"

"That will be all," Deeks said.

When she closed the door he leaped to his feet, paced to the window and back to his desk and back to the window.

His brain was stuck in one deepening groove. Over and over it repeated, "Whoever it is, whoever it is, whoever it is . . ." The telephone snapped the string. He picked it up and said, "I'm not taking any calls, Miss Barr."

"Mr. Deeks," she said, "Colonel Sykes is on the phone."

"Oh," he said. "Put him on."

"Deeks," the colonel said, "I don't suppose this could be a joke, but if it is, it's backfired."

"What's that, Colonel?" Deeks asked in a faint voice.

"I received three separate form notices from the bank today, all saying my account was overdrawn and would I please come in to discuss it with Miss Ashenby."

"Why, that's —"

"Even if it *were* overdrawn," the

colonel continued, "don't you think *one* notification would have been enough? And, incidentally, unless somebody in that organization has embezzled a great deal of money, Deeks, I am *not* overdrawn."

"But that's absolutely —"

"How many of our depositors get such notices, Deeks? What kind of confidence do you suppose this sort of thing builds in the community? It's damn fortunate it happened to be me, because . . ."

For five minutes Deeks said "Yes, sir" into the phone without knowing what he was yessing. He did not remember saying goodbye to the colonel; suddenly he was holding the phone and no voice was coming out of it. Slowly he put the instrument back to its cradle, and then he let his chin drop to his chest. He sat there, hardly breathing, his shoulders hunched, his eyes closed, for many minutes.

Then he sat up, inhaled deeply, and reached for the phone. There was only one thing to do.

"Get me Mr. Fannington," he said to his secretary, and when the PRESIDENT was on the phone, he said, "Mr. Fannington, I took your advice. I went to the doctor for a check-up."

"Oh, good," Mr. Fannington said. "I'm glad you did that."

"I have to tell you, Mr. Fannington," Deeks said, "the doctor says it's time for me to give up, too. He says I'd better quit while — while the quitting's good."

THE ADVENTURES OF TIMOTHY TRANT

ON THE DAY OF THE ROSE SHOW

by Q. PATRICK

LIEUTENANT TIMOTHY TRANT OF THE New York Homicide Bureau lounged in holiday idleness on the terrace of his sister Freda's Connecticut home, watching a small scarlet plane buzz through the cloudless morning sky toward Poughkeepsie. Behind him, in the living room, he heard Freda's voice as she picked up the ringing phone.

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Weiderbacker.

~~A burlesque queen? . . . how~~ perfectly terrible for you . . . no, I don't blame you at all. And on the day of the rose show, too! . . ."

Trant knew that the local garden club rose show was taking place at Mrs. Weiderbacker's that afternoon. He knew, too, that Mrs. Weiderbacker was going to read Freda's Inaugural Address as a proxy since his sister, who had just been re-elected president, had been urged by her doctor to stay home and nurse a summer cold. But how the rich and formidable Mrs. Weiderbacker could have become tangled with a burlesque queen was a new and fascinating development.

"What, Mrs. Weiderbacker?" Freda's telephone voice had shot up an octave. "The speech hasn't arrived?

But I mailed it yesterday. How scandalous. . . . Oh, Daisy will? How sweet of her."

Daisy Groves, Trant knew, was Freda's dearest friend, the wife of Gordon Groves, Mrs. Weiderbacker's long-suffering nephew who lived with her and managed her estate.

Freda appeared on the terrace and snatched up the carbon of her speech from the flagstones where Trant had dropped it. "Imagine! My speech never got to Mrs. Weiderbacker. Thank heavens, Daisy knows shorthand. She can take it down over the phone and type it up in time."

She was back on the phone. "Hello, Daisy dear. Ready?"

Trant listened idly with pleasant fantasies of Mrs. Weiderbacker pitted against a burlesque queen, while his sister launched into her address. "Ladies of the garden club, your greatest friend is the rose . . ."

She gushed on toward an embarrassing middle section, linking contact spraying with democracy — a section he had begged her to cut out. To his relief, she did and soared into her peroration. "Ladies never forget what Oliver Wendell Holmes. . . ."

Suddenly she gave a shrill scream.

© 1952 by United Newspapers Magazine Corporation; originally titled "Revolvers and Roses"

"No! . . . Daisy, it isn't possible! *Murdered!*" Trant jumped up - as Freda rushed out onto the terrace.

"Timothy! Mrs. Weiderbacker's just been shot. They found her in the music room!"

Within a few seconds they were both in Trant's automobile, Freda's cold forgotten in the excitement.

"That nephew!" panted Freda. "I always knew he was dangerous."

"Gordon Groves? Daisy's husband?"

Freda sniffed. "Of course not. Poor Gordon's in bed with a broken leg. It's Miles Groves, the other nephew. He's been a parasite for years. This morning he showed up with some terrible burlesque woman. He'd just married her and calmly expected Mrs. Weiderbacker to welcome her with open arms. There was a dreadful scene. Mrs. Weiderbacker told me all about it on the phone. She was going to cut off his allowance and change her will. And now . . . oh, poor Mrs. Weiderbacker!"

So that was how the burlesque queen fitted into the pattern. And a very sinister pattern it seemed.

Soon they arrived at Mrs. Weiderbacker's impressive tree-screened mansion. In the hallway, Daisy Groves, her pretty face red and swollen and her eyes wet, rushed toward Freda. The two women clutched each other. At that moment the local police drove up, and Trant identified himself to the tough, round-faced inspector.

An anxious, hovering butler took them both through the living room toward the music room. He had discovered the body. After Mrs. Weiderbacker had spoken to Freda and left Daisy in the hall on the phone, she had sent the butler to the tool shed for some garden twine. When he brought it to the music room a few minutes later, he had found her dead.

"You heard no shot?" barked the inspector.

"I heard a muffled report," the butler said, "but I simply thought it was the backfire of an automobile."

As the butler opened the music room door, Trant and the Inspector were almost suffocated by the surging scent of roses. On three long tables the rose show entries of all the local ladies blazed in resplendent glory — and on the carpet in front of them, large, stately, and formidable even in death, lay Mrs. Weiderbacker with a crimson stain on her chintzed bosom.

The Inspector picked up a gun. "Whose is this?"

"Mrs. Weiderbacker's, sir. She kept it in the desk drawer."

"Get everyone together."

"But Mr. Gordon is in bed with a cast on his leg, sir. And Mr. Miles and the — er — young lady are still out for a walk."

"Get them."

There was a great deal of lumbering around and order-shouting. Trant stood looking at the open French windows through which anyone could have slipped in from the garden unobserved.

He glanced down again at Mrs. Weiderbacker. Then, with an odd expression, half dubious, half satisfied, he drew a particularly lush yellow rose from its arrangement and put it in his buttonhole.

Everyone was assembled in the living room — the butler near the door, Gordon Groves, dark and disturbed, on a sofa, a blanket over the plaster of his leg cast. Daisy calmer and pale-faced now, was close to Freda with a shorthand pad on her lap. By far the most conspicuous people present were the “parasite” nephew and the “burlesque queen.”

Miles Groves, a tall, blond, amiably handsome young man, stood by a table on which a small heap of ripe and unripe strawberries nestled in a handkerchief. At his side, more spectacular and perfumed than the rose show entries, was the redheaded Chloe Carmichael, the late Mrs. Weiderbacker's new and controversial niece-in-law.

The Inspector had clumsily gathered the facts and was interpreting them. Already he had eliminated the butler, who had been in Mrs. Weiderbacker's employ 30 years, Daisy, who had been taking down Freda's speech over the phone, and Gordon, who had been immobilized upstairs. He was glaring now at Miles.

“So Mrs. Weiderbacker disapproved of your new wife. She threatened to stop your allowance and cut you out of her will.”

“That's right,” said Miles calmly.

“How much was your allowance?”

“Ten thousand a year.”

“And your share of the estate at her death?”

“One-third.” It was Gordon who spoke from the couch. “I get two-thirds. Miles's share is about a half million dollars.”

“Even so,” said the unruffled Miles, “I didn't kill her. I expected her to cut me off. In fact, I was delighted. I was tired of living off her charity. I'm starting a new life.”

The Inspector snorted cynically. Chloe Carmichael broke in: “It's true. He's getting a job. And he didn't kill her. He was out walking with me.”

“Prove it,” said the Inspector. “Prove he didn't come sneaking back through the French windows and —”

“He didn't,” blazed Chloe.

For the first time Lieutenant Trant spoke. Mildly he said to Miles: “What are those — strawberries?”

The “parasite” nephew looked sheepish. “Oh, I just saw them on the walk. Aunt was crazy about them. I thought I'd bring her a few to show the old thing there were no hard feelings.”

The Inspector snorted again.

Trant asked: “You didn't see anyone or anything on your walk?”

“No one.” Miles shrugged. “We saw a plane — a little private plane.”

Trant alerted. “That plane passed over my sister's house just a couple of minutes before the murder was discovered.”

“Yeah,” put in the Inspector. “Charlie Smith on his daily run to Poughkeepsie.”

Trant glanced at him. "Could you see that plane from this house?"

"Guess you couldn't. Charlie always passes over Linkville way."

"Linkville!" cried Chloe. "That's where we were. I saw a sign."

Trant spun around to Miles. "What color was the plane?"

"Green," said Miles.

"No, no. It was red. It —" Chloe broke off, color flooding her cheeks.

It was then that the Inspector pounced. "Of course that plane's red — bright, firehouse red. Tricked you, didn't he? Smart! The girl went for the walk, saw the plane, told the guy about it in order to give him an alibi. But she forgot to mention the color. Okay, Groves."

As the Inspector strode forward, Trant murmured to Miles: "Mr. Groves, would you please be good enough to hand me ten ripe strawberries from that heap?"

Puzzled, Miles selected ten of the little berries and held them out on his palm. Some were scarlet ripe; others were bright green and obviously unripe. Trant's smile was almost a grin.

"I thought so when I first saw the berries. Miles Groves has red-green color blindness. A lot of men have it without even knowing it. The plane looked green to him. I guess that lets you out, Mr. Groves. You saw the plane all right."

While the Inspector spluttered, Trant moved toward Gordon Groves. As he passed Daisy and Freda, he picked up Daisy's shorthand pad and glanced at the neat Gregg: "Ladies of

the garden club, your greatest friend is the rose." Freda's literary effort seemed embarrassingly out of place now.

"I imagine, Mr. Groves —" Trant was still glancing at the pad, but now he looked up quickly at Gordon — "that life with Mrs. Weiderbacker was none too easy. She was bossy, difficult, close-fisted, maybe? How much nicer it would have been to have a million dollars of your own. And what a temptation to kill her when there was a perfect fall guy in the house."

Gordon Groves's face was thunderous. "You suggest that I —?"

"Oh, not you. But your wife has the identical motive." Trant twisted around to Daisy. "Very ingenious, Mrs. Groves."

"Timothy!" It was Freda who leaped up. "How dare you accuse Daisy? All that time she was on the phone taking my dictation."

"She was?" Trant read aloud from the middle of the pad. "*One could almost compare contact spraying with democracy.*" He turned to the butler. "Who picked up the mail today?"

"Er — I think, sir, it was Mrs. Groves."

"Exactly." Trant shook his head at his sister. "Your speech did arrive after all and it gave a clever murderess an ideal murder set-up. She took the speech from the mailman, copied it out in shorthand, pretended it hadn't come, and then offered to take it down over the phone."

"A perfect alibi with the shorthand

pad as fool-proof evidence. What a cinch to pretend to take dictation, to drop the receiver, to slip into the music room, shoot Mrs. Weiderbacker, and then to run back and pick up the dictation again.

"Too bad for her I made you cut out the contact-spraying paragraph. It was in the copy you mailed but not in the copy you dictated. That, I'm afraid, is going to be her noose."

Daisy had jumped up now, white-faced and eagle-eyed.

"It's a lie. I never went near the music room."

"You're sure, Mrs. Groves? When we arrived, your face was red and swollen; your eyes were running. It

might, of course, have been due to natural grief, but then again . . ."

Trant picked the full-blown yellow rose from his buttonhole and held it under Daisy's nose. Almost immediately, she sneezed; her eyes started to run, her face to pinken.

"As I thought," murmured Trant. "Not natural grief, but a violent case of rose-fever."

He turned rather sadly to his sister. "I'm sorry to do this, Freda," he said. "But next time you pick a best friend, I recommend someone a little less — cold-blooded."

His glance at Chloe Carmichael was frankly appreciative. "A burlesque queen, for example."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Winner of First Prize in last year's contest:

A. H. Z. Carr's THE BLACK KITTEN

and 13 other complete stories, including:

Hugh Pentecost's A MATTER OF JUSTICE

Frederick Nebel's CHANCE IS SOMETIMES AN ENEMY

Mignon G. Eberhart's DANGEROUS WIDOWS

and unusual stories by H. G. Wells, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Buchan, and Michael Gilbert.

VIOLENT, VIVID, RESTLESS . . .

Budd Schulberg decided to become a writer when, as a boy, he listened to his father, then in charge of Paramount Studios in Hollywood, read from the works of Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Joseph Conrad, and Charles Dickens — great teachers all. At the age of fifteen, while traveling to Europe with his family, young Budd began seriously to put words one after the other. The first result was five chapters of a projected novel about a murderer who left no fingerprints because he had only a hook on his wooden arm. "That little number," says Budd Schulberg, "has fortunately been lost to posterity."

This was Budd's "poetry period" too. Later, as an undergraduate at Dartmouth, he wrote short stories, and one of them won a prize in a national intercollegiate contest. But it was during the time he was working in Hollywood, after graduation from Dartmouth, that Budd Schulberg began to come into his own. His father liked the short stories Budd was writing, showed them to a famous literary agent — and Budd Schulberg, the writer, was launched; for his first half dozen short stories sold to "Collier's," "Saturday Evening Post," and "Liberty."

One of those first short stories was a little number called "What Makes Sammy Run?" Budd Schulberg conceived the idea of expanding this short into a novel — and the rest is literary history. The novel — also titled WHAT MAKES SAMMY RUN? — raised a critical storm, added a new phrase to our language, created an unforgettable picture of an all-American heel, became a sensational success, and today has a permanent place in the Modern Library.

But Mr. Schulberg was only on his way. His second novel, THE HARDER THEY FALL, added to his stature by dealing realistically with the tough, ruthless world of prizefighting. And his third novel, THE DISENCHANTED, reached the top of the best-seller lists, achieving both popular and critical acclaim. THE DISENCHANTED, a Book-of-the-Month Club choice, created another great American portrait — that "golden figure of the glittering Twenties" (based on the life and times of F. Scott Fitzgerald).

And then Mr. Schulberg went back — seriously — to his father's business. He wrote the original story and screenplay of "On the Waterfront" — one of the finest motion pictures in the whole history of that difficult art form. "On the Waterfront" won no less than nine Oscars for

1954 — and all richly deserved. It was voted the best picture of the year; Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint took top honors as best actor and best supporting actress; Elia Kazan was judged the best director of the year; and Budd Schulberg's story and screenplay, suggested by Malcolm Johnson's Pulitzer Prize newspaper articles, won the most coveted writing award in the motion picture industry. Then in 1955 Mr. Schulberg followed up the prize-winning movie with a novel based substantially on the same material; *WATERFRONT* was hailed by "The New York Times" as "the best of Schulberg, a full-fledged performance by a gifted American writer."

And now we bring you Budd Schulberg's "Murder on the Waterfront." This tale of Matt Gillis, an Irish-thick rebel of a longshoreman, has the same background — "the violent, vivid, restless, corrupted" waterfront. Undoubtedly, the story is a by-product of Mr. Schulberg's research and work on the motion picture and the novel: it has the same power, the same honesty, the same impact.

MURDER ON THE WATERFRONT

by BUDD SCHULBERG

THE ALARM WAS ABOUT TO RING when Matt Gillis reached out his bearlike, heavy-muscled arm and shut it off. Habit. Half-past 6. Summer with the light streaming in around the patched window shades, and winter when half-past 6 was black as midnight. Matt stretched his heavyweight, muscular body and groaned. Habit woke you up at half-past 6 every morning, but habit didn't make you like it — not on these raw winter mornings when the wind blew in from the sea, whipping along the waterfront with an intensity it seemed to reserve for longshoremen. He shivered in anticipation.

Matt listened to the wind howling through the narrow canyon of Eleventh Street and thought to himself: Another day, another icy-fingered, stinking day. He pushed one foot from under the covers to test the temperature, and then quickly withdrew it into the warmth of the double bed again. Cold. Damn that janitor, Lacey — the one they all called Rudolph because of his perpetually red nose. Never enough heat in the place. Well, the landlord was probably saying, what do they expect for twenty-five a month?

Matt rolled over heavily, ready for the move into his work clothes.

© 1954 by Budd Schulberg

"Matt?" his wife, Franny, murmured, feeling for him drowsily in the dark. "I'll get up; fix you some coffee."

"It's all right." His buxom Fran. Matt patted her. Her plump-pretty Irish face was still swollen with sleep. For a moment he remembered her as she had been fifteen years ago: the prettiest kid in the neighborhood — bright, flirty, sky-blue eyes and a pug nose, a little bit of a girl smothered in Matt's big arms, a child in the arms of a grizzly. Now she was plump all over, something like him on a smaller, softer scale, as if she had had to grow along his lines to keep him company.

"Matt, you don't mind me gettin' fat?" she had whispered to him one night in the wide, metal-frame bed after the kids finally had fallen asleep.

"Naw, you're still the best-lookin' woman in the neighborhood," Matt had said gallantly.

"At least you can always find me in the dark," Fran had giggled. They had got to laughing then, until Fran had to stop him because everything Matt did, he did big — laugh, fight, eat, drink, tell off the mob in the union. Even when he thought he was talking normally, he shouted, he belowed, so when he had chuckled there in the bed, the children — Tom and Mickey and Kate and Johnny and Peggy, the five they had had so far — had stirred in their beds and Fran had said, "Shhh, if the baby wakes up you'll be walkin' the floor with her."

Matt swung his long legs out of the bed and felt the cold touch of the linoleum. He sat there a moment in his long underwear, thinking — he wasn't sure of what; the day ahead, the days of his youth, the time his old man came home from the pier with three fingers off his right hand (copper sheeting — cut off at the knuckle nice and clean), and all those years the old man battled for his compensation. It was all the old man could talk about, finally, and got to be a joke — never to Pop, but to Matt and his brothers when they were big enough to support him.

Big Matt sat there on the edge of the bed rubbing sleep out of his eyes, thinking, thinking, while his wife, warm and sweet and full in her nightgown, half rose behind him and whispered, "Coffee? Let me get up and make you a cup of coffee." She wanted to say more; she wanted to say, "Look, Matt honey, I know what it is to go down there to the shape-up when the sun is still climbing up the backs of the buildings. I know what it is for you to stand there with three-four hundred other men and have the hiring boss, Fisheye Moran, look you over like you was so much meat in a butcher shop. I know what it is for you to go to work every morning like you had a job — only you haven't got a job unless Fisheye, the three-time loser put there by the Village mob, hands you a brass check." She wanted to say, "Yes, and I know what it is for

you to be left standing in the street; I know what you feel when the hiring boss looks through you with those pale blue fisheyes that give him his name." *That's all today, come back tomorra.*

Matt was on his feet now, a burly bear in his long underwear, stretching and groaning to push himself awake. Fran started to get up, but he put his big hand on her shoulder and pushed her back into the warm bed. Well, all right. She was glad to give in. When could a body rest except these precious few minutes in the early morning? "You be careful now, Matt. You be careful. Don't get in no trouble."

Fran knew her Matt, the Irish-thick rebel of Local 474, one of the lionhearted — or foolhardy — handful who dared speak up against the Lippy Keegan mob, which had the longshore local in their pocket, and the loading racket, the lunch-hour gambling, and all the other side lines that bring in a quick dollar on the docks. Lippy and his goons ran the neighborhood like storm troopers, and longshoremen who knew what was good for them went along with Keegan's boys and took what they could get. Matt was always trying to get others to back him up, but the fear was too deep. "Matt, I got me wife and kids to think about; leave me alone," they'd say, and push their 30 cents across the bar for another whiskey.

Matt tried to make as little noise as possible as he went down the

creaky stairway. He closed the tenement door behind him and stood a moment in the clammy morning, feeling the weather. He zipped up his windbreaker and pulled his old cap down on his forehead. Then he drew his head down into the heavy collar, threw out his chest, and turned his face into the wind. It was a big, strong-boned, beefy face, with a heavy jaw and a broken nose, a face that had taken plenty. Over the years the Keegan boys had developed a begrudging respect for Matt. They had hit him with everything and he still kept coming on. The gift of getting up — that's what they called it on the waterfront.

Matt ducked into the Longdock Bar & Grill on the corner across the street from the pier. It was full of longshoremen grabbing a cup of coffee and maybe some ham and eggs before drifting over to the shape-up. There were men of all sizes and ages, with weatherbeaten faces like Matt's, many of them with flattened noses, trophies of battles on the docks and in the barrooms; here and there were expugs with big-time memories: the cheers of friends and five hundred dollars for an eight-rounder. Threading through the dock workers was a busy little man, whose name was Billy Morgan, though everybody called him "J.P." because he was the money-lender for the mob. If you didn't work, J.P. was happy to lend you a deuce or half a bill, at ten per cent a week. If you fell too far behind, J.P. whispered to Fisheye, and Fish-

eye threw you a couple of days' work until the loan was paid off. They had you coming and going, the mob. Matt looked at J.P. and turned away.

Over in the corner were a couple of Lippy's pistols, Specs Sinclair, a mild-looking, pasty-skinned man who didn't look like an enforcer but had maybe a dozen stiffs to his credit, and Feets McKenna, a squat muscle man who could rough-and-tumble with the best. Feets was sergeant-at-arms for the local. Specs, for whom signing his name was a lot of writing, was recording secretary. Matt looked straight at them to show he wasn't backing away, ever. Union officials. Only three-time losers need apply.

Matt pushed his way into the group at the short-order counter. They were men dressed like himself, in old trousers and flannel shirts, with old caps worn slightly askew in the old-country way. They all knew Matt and respected the way he stood up; but a stand-up guy, as they called him, was nobody you wanted to get close to. Not if you wanted to work and stay in one piece in Lippy Keegan's sector of the harbor.

Matt was waiting for his coffee when he felt a fist smash painfully into his side. He winced and started an automatic counter at whoever it was, and then he looked down and grinned. He should have known. It was Runt Nolan, whose hundred ring battles and 25 years of brawling on the docks were stamped into his flattened face. But a life of beatings had failed to deaden the twinkle in

his eyes. Runt Nolan was always seeing the funny side, even when he was looking down the business end of a triggerboy's .38. Where other longshoremen turned away in fear from Lippy's pistoleros, Runt always seemed to take a perverse delight in baiting them. Sometimes they laughed him off and sometimes, if he went on provoking them — and longshoremen were watching to see if Runt could get away with it — they would oblige him with a blackjack or a piece of pipe. Runt had a head like a rock and more lives than a pair of cats, and the stories of his miraculous recoveries from these beatings had become a riverfront legend.

Once they had left him around the corner in the alley lying face down in his own blood, after enough blows on the noggin to crack the skull of a horse; and an hour later, when everyone figured he was on his way to the morgue, damned if he didn't stagger back into the Longdock and pound the bar for whiskey. "I should worry what they do to me, I'm on borried time," Runt Nolan liked to say.

Runt grinned when he saw Matt rub his side with mock resentment. "Mornin', Matt me lad, just wanted t' see if you was in condition."

"Don't be worryin' about my condition. One more like that and I'll stand you right on your head."

"Come on, you big blowhard, I'm ready for you." Runt fell into a fierce boxing stance and jabbed his small knuckle-broken left fist into Matt's face.

Matt got his coffee and a sinker and sat down at one of the small tables with Runt. Runt was rarely caught eating. He seemed to consider the need for solid food something of a disgrace, a sign of weakness. Whiskey and beer and maybe once a day a corned-beef sandwich — that was Runt's diet, and in the face of medical science it had kept him wiry and resilient at fifty-five.

"What kind of a boat we got today?" Matt asked. Runt lived in a two-dollar hotel above the Longdock Bar and he was usually up on his shipping news.

"Bananas," Runt said, drawing out the middle vowel in disgust.

"Bananas!" Matt groaned. Bananas meant plenty of shoulder work, toting the heavy stalks out of the hold. A banana carrier was nothing less than a human pack mule. There was only one good thing about bananas: the men who worked steady could afford to lay off bananas, and so there was always a need for extra hands. The docker who had no *in* with the hiring boss, and even the fellow who was on the outs with the Keegan mob, stood a chance of picking up a day on bananas.

By the time Matt and Runt reached the pier, ten minutes before the 7:30 whistle, there were already a couple of hundred men on hand, warming themselves around fires in metal barrels and shifting their feet to keep the numbness away. Some of them were hard-working men with families, professional longshoremen whose Ire-

land-born fathers had moved cargo before them. And some of them were only a peg above the bum, casuals who drifted in for a day now and then to keep themselves in drinking money. Some of them were big men with powerful chests, large, raw-faced men who looked like throwbacks to the days of bare-knuckle fights-to-a-finish. Some of them were surprisingly slight, wizened-faced men in cast-off clothing, the human flotsam of the waterfront.

Fisheye came out of the pier, flanked by a couple of the boys, "Flash" Gordon and "Blackie" McCook. There were about three hundred longshoremen waiting for jobs now. Obediently they formed themselves into a large horseshoe so Fisheye could look them over. Meat in a butcher shop. The men Fisheye wanted were the ones who worked. You kicked back part of your day's pay to Fisheye or did favors for Lippy if you wanted to work regular. You didn't have to have a record, but a couple of years in a respectable pen didn't do you any harm.

"I need two hundred banana carriers." Fisheye's hoarse voice seemed to take its pitch from the foghorns that barked along the Hudson. Jobs for two hundred men at a coveted \$2.27 an hour. The three, maybe four hundred men eyed one another in listless rivalry. "You — and you — Pete — okay, Slim . . ." Fisheye was screening the men with a cold, hard look. Nearly twenty years ago a broken-down dock-worker had gone across

the street from the shape-up. "No work?" the bartender had said, perfunctorily, and the old man had answered, "Nah, he just looked right through me with those blasted fish-eyes of his." Fisheye—it had made the bartender laugh, and the name had stuck.

Anger felt cold and uncomfortable in Matt's stomach as he watched Fisheye pass out those precious tabs. He didn't mind seeing the older men go in, the ones he had shaped with for years, especially family men like himself. What gave him that hateful, icy feeling in his belly was seeing the young kids go in ahead of him, new-generation hoodlums like the fresh-faced Skelly kid who boasted of the little muscle jobs he did for Lippy and the boys as his way of paying off for steady work. Young Skelly had big ideas, they said around the bar. One of these days he might be crowding Lippy himself. That's how it went down here. "Peaches" Maloney had been Number One—until Lippy dumped him into the gutter outside the Longdock. Matt had seen them come and go. And all the time he had stood up proud and hard while lesser men got the work tabs and the gravy.

Fisheye almost had his 200 men now. He put his hand on Runt Nolan's shoulder. "All right, you little sawed-off rat, go on in. But remember I'm doin' ya a favor. One word out of line and I'll bounce ya off the ship."

Runt tightened his hands into fists, wanting to stand up and speak his mind. But a day was a day and he

hadn't worked steady enough lately to keep himself in beers. He looked over at Matt with a helpless defiance and went on into the pier.

Matt waited, thinking about Fran and the kids. And he waited, thinking at Fisheye: It ain't right, it ain't right, a bum like you havin' all this power. He couldn't keep it out of his face. Fisheye flushed and glared back at him and picked men all around Matt to round out his two hundred. He shoved Matt's face in it by coming toward him as if he were going to pick him and then reaching over his shoulder for Will Murphy, a toothless old sauce hound whom Matt could outwork five for one. There never had been enough caution in Matt, and now he felt himself trembling with anger. He was grabbing Fisheye before he had time to think it out, holding the startled boss by the thick lapels of his windbreaker.

"Listen to me, you fatheaded bum. If you don't put me on today I'll break you in two. I got kids to feed. You hear me, Fisheye?"

Fisheye pulled himself away and looked around for help. Blackie and young Skelly moved in.

"Okay, boys," Fisheye said, when he saw they were there. "I c'n handle this myself. This bigmouth is dumb, but he's not so dumb he wants to wind up in the river. Am I right, Matt me lad?"

In the river. A senseless body kicked off the stringpiece into the black and secretive river, while the city looked the other way. Cause of

death: accidental drowning. Dozens and dozens of good men had been splashed into the dark river like so much garbage. Matt knew some of the widows who had stories to tell, if only someone would listen. In the river. Matt drew away from Fisheye. What was the use? Outnumbered and outgunned. But one of these days — went the dream — he and Runt would get some action in the local, some following; they'd call a real election and —

Behind Matt a big truck blasted its horn, ready to drive into the pier. Fisheye thumbed Matt to one side. "All right, get moving, you're blocking traffic, we got a ship to turn around." Matt spat into the gutter and walked away.

Back across the street in the Longdock, Matt sat with a beer in front of him, automatically watching the morning television: some good-looking, fast-talking dame selling something — yatta-ta yatta-ta yatta-ta. In the old days, at least you had peace and quiet in the Longdock until the boys with the work tabs came in for lunch. Matt walked up the riverfront to another gin mill and sat with another beer. Now and then a fellow like himself would drift in, on the outs with Lippy and open to Matt's arguments about getting up a petition to call an honest union election: about time we got the mob's foot off'n our necks; sure, they're tough, but if there's enough of us . . . it was the old dream of standing up like honest-

to-God Americans instead of like oxen with rings in their noses.

Matt thought he was talking quiet but even his whisper had volume, and farther down the bar Feets and Specs were taking it in. They weren't frowning or threatening, but just looking, quietly drinking and taking it all in.

When Matt finished his beer and said see-ya-later, Specs and Feets rose dutifully and followed him out. A liner going down-river let out a blast that swallowed up all the other sounds in the harbor. Matt didn't hear them approach until Feets had a hand on his shoulder. Feets was built something like Matt, round and hard. Specs was slight and not much to look at. He wore very thick glasses. He had shot the wrong fellow once. Lippy had told him to go out and buy a new pair of glasses and warned him not to slip up that way again.

"What d'ya say, Matt?" Feets asked, and from his tone no one could have thought them anything but friends.

"Hello, Feets, Specs," Matt said.

"Listen, Matt, we'd like to talk to you a minute," Feets said.

"Then talk," Matt said. "As long as it's only talk, go ahead."

"Why do you want to give us so much trouble?" Specs said — any defiance of power mystified him. "You should straighten yourself out, Matt. You'd be working three-four days a week if you just learned to keep that big yap of yours shut."

"I didn't know you were so worried about whether I worked or not."

"Matt, don't be such a thickheaded mick," Feets argued. "Why be agitated 'n' alla time? You ain't gonna get anywheres, that's for sure. All ya do is louse yourself up with Lippy."

Matt said something short and harsh about Lippy. Feets and Specs looked pained, as if Matt were acting in bad taste.

"I wish you wouldn't say stuff like that," Specs said. His face got very white when he was ready for action. On the waterfront he had a reputation for enjoying the trigger squeezing. "You keep saying that stuff and we'll have to do something about it. You know how Lippy is."

Matt thought a moment about the danger of saying what he wanted to say: Fran and the kids home waiting for money he'd have to borrow from the moneylender. Why look for trouble? Why buck for the bottom of the river? Was it fair to Fran? Why couldn't he be like so many other longshoremen — like Flanagan, who had no love for Lippy Keegan but went along to keep food on the table? Lippy ran the piers just like he owned them. You didn't have to like Lippy, but it sure made life simpler if he liked you.

Matt thought about all this, but he couldn't help himself. He was a self-respecting man, and it galled him that a pushy racketeer — a graduate of the old Arsenal Mob — and a couple of punks could call themselves a union. I shouldn't say this, Matt was think-

ing, and he was already saying it:

"Yeah, I know how Lippy is. Lippy is gonna get the surprise of his stinkin' life one of these days. Lippy is gonna find-himself —"

"You dumb harp," Feets said. "You must like to get hit in the head."

"There's lots I like better," Matt admitted. "But I sure as hell won't back away from it."

Feets and Specs looked at each other and the glance said clearly: What are you going to do with a thickhead like this? They shrugged and walked away from Matt, back to their places at the bar. Later in the day they would give Lippy a full account and find out the next move. This Matt Gillis was giving their boss a hard time. Everything would be lovely down here if it wasn't for this handful of talk-back guys. They leaned on the bar with a reassuring sense that they were on the side of peace and stability, that Matt Gillis was asking for trouble.

Matt met Runt in the Longdock around five-thirty. Runt was buying because he had the potatoes in his pocket. They talked about this petition they were getting up to call a regular meeting. Runt had been talking to a couple of old-timers in his hatch gang who were half scared to death and half ready to go along. And there were maybe half a dozen young fellows who had young ideas and no use for the old ways of buying jobs from Fisheye and coming on the double whenever Lippy whistled. An-

other round or two and it was supper-time.

"Have another ball, Matt. The money's burnin' a hole in me pocket."

"Thanks, Runt, but I gotta get home. The wife'll be hittin' me with a mop." This was a familiar, joking threat in the Gillis domain.

Matt wiped his mouth with his sleeve and rubbed his knuckles on Runt's head. "Now don't get in no arguments. You watch yourself now." It was bad business, Matt knew, bucking the mob and hitting the bottle at the same time. They could push you into the drink some night and who was to say you weren't dead drunk, just another "death by accidental drowning."

Matt was worried about Runt as he walked up the dark side street to his tenement. Runt took too many chances. Runt liked to say, "I had me fun and I drunk me fill. What've I got to lose?"

I better keep my eye on the little fella now, that we're pushin' so hard for this up-and-up election, Matt was thinking, when he felt something solid whop him just behind the ear. The blow had force enough to drop a horse but Matt half turned, made a club of his right hand and was ready to wield it when the something solid whopped him again at the back of his head. He thought it was the kid, the Skelly punk, there with Feets, but he wasn't sure. It was dark and his head was coming apart. In a bad dream something was swinging at him on the ground — hobnailed shoes, the

finishing touch. Feets, they called him. The darkness closed in over him like a black tarpaulin. . . .

Everybody was talking at once and — was it time for him to get up and shape? — he was sprawled on the bed in his room. Go 'way, lemme sleep.

"Matt, listen, this is Doc Wolff." The small, lean-faced physician was being pushed and breathed on: "The rest of you go on, get out of here."

Half the tenement population was crowded into the Gillises' narrow flat. Mrs. Geraghty, who was always like that, took the kids up to eat at her place. Doc Wolff washed out the ugly wounds in Matt's scalp. Half the people in the neighborhood owed him money he would never see — or ask for. Some of the old-timers still owed his father, who insisted on practicing at seventy-five. Father and son had patched up plenty of wounds like these. They were specialists on black-jack, steel-pipe and gun-butt contusions. Jews in an Irish district, they never took sides, verbally, in the endless guerrilla war between the dock mob and the "insougenents." All they could do, when a longshoreman got himself in a fix like this, was to overlook the bill. The Wolffs were still poor from too much overlooking.

"Is it serious, Doctor?"

"We'd better X-ray, to make sure it isn't a skull fracture. I'd like to keep him in St. Vincent's a couple of days."

It was no fracture, just a couple of six-inch gashes and a concussion — a neat professional job performed ac-

cording to instructions. "Don't knock him out of the box for good. Just leave him so he'll have something to think about for a week or two."

On the second day Runt came up with a quart and the good news that the men on the dock were signing the petition. The topping of Matt had steamed them up, where Lippy had figured it would scare them off. Runt said he thought they had enough men, maybe a couple of dozen, to call a rank-and-file meeting.

Father Conley, a waterfront priest with savvy and guts, had offered the rectory library as a haven.

But that night Fran sat at the side of Matt's bed in the ward for a long talk-to. She had a plan. It had been on her mind for a long time. This was her moment to push it through. Her sister's husband worked for a storage company. The pay was good, the work was regular, and best of all there weren't any Lippy Keegans muscling you if you didn't play it their way. This brother-in-law said there was an opening for Matt. He could come in on a temporary basis and maybe work his way into regular union membership if he liked it. The brother-in-law had a little pull in that direction.

"Please, Matt. Please." It was Fran's domestic logic against his bulldog gift of fighting back. If he was a loner like Runt Nolan, he could stand up to Lippy and Specs and Feets and young Skelly and the rest of that trash all he wanted. But was it fair to Fran and the kids to pass up a sure

seventy-five dollars a week in order to go hungry and bloody on the piers?

"Why does it always have to be you that sticks his neck out? Next time it'll be worse. They'll . . ."

Yes, Matt knew. The river: Lippy Keegan's silent partner, the old North River, waiting for him in the dark.

"Okay, Franny," Matt was saying under his bandages. "Okay. Tell Denny" — that was the brother-in-law — "I'll take the job."

In the storage vaults it was nice and quiet. The men came right to work from their homes. There was none of that stopping in at the corner and shooting the breeze about ships coming in and where the jobs might be — no hit or miss. The men were different too: good steady workers who had been there for years, not looking for any excitement. It seemed funny to Matt not to be looking behind him to see if any of Lippy's boys were on his tail, funny to have money in his pockets without having to worry how he was going to pay it back to the loan sharks.

When Matt had been there three weeks, Fran went out and bought herself a new dress — the first new one in almost two years. And the following Sunday they went up to the park and had lunch at the cafeteria near the zoo — their first visit to a restaurant in Lord knows when. Fran put her hand in Matt's and said, "Oh, Matt, isn't this better? Isn't this how people are supposed to live?"

Matt said yeah, he guessed so. It was good to see Fran happy and re-

laxed, no longer worried about food on the table for the kids, or whether he'd get home in one piece. Only — he couldn't put it into words, but when he got back to work on the fifth floor of the huge storage building, he knew what was going to come over him.

And next day it did, stronger than at any time since he started. He wondered what Runt was doing, and Jocko and Bagles and Timmy and the rest of the gang in the Longdock. He hadn't been in since the first week he started at the storage. The fellows had all asked him how he was feeling and how he liked the new job, but he felt something funny about them, as if they were saying, "Well, you finally let Lippy run you off the docks, huh, Matt?" "All that big talk about cleaning up the union and then you fold like an accordion, huh, Matt?" It was in their eyes — even Runt's.

"Well, I'm glad to see you got smart and put your hook away," Runt actually said. "Me, I'd do the same if I was a family man. But I always run too fast for the goils to catch me." Runt laughed and poked Matt lightly, but there was something about it wasn't the same.

Matt ran into Runt on the street a week or so later and asked him how everything was going. He had heard the neighborhood scuttlebutt about a new meeting coming up in the parish house. A government labor man was going to talk to them on how to get their rights. Father Conley had pulled

in a trade-union lawyer for them and everything seemed to be moving ahead.

But Runt was secretive with Matt. Mike felt the brush; he was an outsider now. Runt had never said a word in criticism of Matt's withdrawal from the waterfront — just occasional cracks about fellows like himself who were too dumb to do anything else but stand their ground and fight it out. But it got under Matt's skin. He had the face of a bruiser, and inlanders would think of him as "tough-looking." But actually Matt was thin-skinned, emotional, hypersensitive. Runt wouldn't even tell him the date of the secret meeting, just asked him how he liked the storage job.

"It's a real good deal," Matt said. No seven-thirty shape-up. No muscle men masquerading as shop stewards. The same check every week. What more could he want?

What more than stacking cardboard containers in a long tunnel-like room illuminated by neon tubing? Matt wondered what there was about the waterfront. Why did men humiliate themselves by standing like cattle in the shape-up? What was so good about swinging a cargo hook — hoisting cement, copper ore, coffee, noxious cargoes that tickled your throat and maybe were slowly poisoning you?

But that didn't tell the whole story, Matt was thinking as he handled the storage containers automatically. There was the salt air; there were the ships coming in from Spain, from South America, Greece, all over

the world. There was the way the river sparkled on a bright day. And there was the busy movement of the harbor: the sound of the ferries, the tugs, the barges, the freighters, and the great luxury ladies with their autocratic noses in the air. There were the different kinds of cargoes to handle — furs, perfume, sardines, cognac — and who was to blame them if they got away with a bottle or two; it wasn't pilferage on the waterfront until you trucked it away. There was the teamwork of a good gang working the cargo from the hatch and over the deck to the pier: the winch men, the deck men, the hatch boss, the high-low drivers, everybody moving together to an unstated but strongly felt rhythm that could be thrown off if just one man in a twenty-three-man gang didn't know his job. And then there were the breaks for lunch — not cold sandwiches in a metal container, but a cut of hot roast beef in the bar across the street, with a cold beer to wash it down. And there was the talk of last night's fight or today's ball game or the latest cute trick pulled off by the longshore racketeers.

The waterfront; the violent, vivid, restless, corrupted, "we're-doin'-lovely" waterfront.

Matt felt that way for days and said nothing about it. He'd sit in the front room with his shoes off, drinking beer, reading the tabloids, and wondering until it ached him what Runt and the boys were up to.

One evening when he came home, Flanagan and Bennett and some of

the other neighbors were busy talking on the steps. Matt heard. "Maybe he's just on one of his periodicals and he's sleeping it off somewhere." And, "He coulda shipped out somewhere. He used to be an A.B. and he's just ornery enough to do it." And Matt heard, "When he gets his load on, anything c'n happen. He could walk off the end of the pier into the river and think he was home in bed."

Runt Nolan! No hide nor hair of him in three days, Flanagan said. Matt ran upstairs to tell Fran. She saw the look in his eyes when he talked about Runt, who always said he was "on borried time." "Now, Matt, no use getting yourself excited. Wait and see. Now, Matt." She saw the look in his eyes was the old look, before he settled for the cozy inland job with the storage company.

He paced up and down, but the children got on his nerves and he went over to talk to Father Conley. The father was just as worried as Matt. Specs had been warning Runt not to hold any more meetings in the rectory. Specs had told Runt to take it easy for his own good.

Matt went home after a while but he couldn't sleep. At one thirty in the morning he put his clothes back on and went down to the Longdock. What's the story, and news of Runt?

Nine days later there was news of Runt. The police department had made contact with Runt, by means of a grappling hook probing the soft, rotten bottom of the river. Runt wasn't "on borried time" any more.

He had paid back every minute of it. Cause of death: accidental drowning. On the night of his disappearance, Runt had been seen wandering the gin mills in a state of inebriation. In other words, bagged. There were no marks of violence on Runt. How could anyone prove he hadn't slipped. The good old North River, Lippy's silent partner, had done it again.

It was a good funeral. Everybody in the neighborhood was there—even Lippy Keegan, and Specs and Skelly and the rest of the boys. After the Mass, Father Conley came out on the sidewalk, and Matt and some of the others who were closest to Runt gathered around to hear what the father had to say.

They had seen the father steamed before but never like this. "Accident my eye," he said. "If they think we're going to take this lying down, they're dumber than I think they are."

"What can we do, Father?"

Everybody looked around. It was Flanagan, who had come up behind Matt; Flanagan, who always played it very cozy with the Keegans. But like most of the others, he had liked having Runt around—that cocky little bantam. The Longdock wouldn't be the same without him. It looked like Runt, at the bottom of the river, had done more damage to Lippy than when he was around the docks shooting off his mouth.

Father Conley said, "We're going to keep this case alive. We'll question every single person who talked to

Runt the day they hit him in the head. We'll keep needling the police for action. Keegan hasn't heard the end of Runt Nolan."

"Now's the time to put somebody up to run for president against Lippy," the Bennett kid said.

Everybody looked at Matt. Matt looked down at his uncomfortable black shoes. He would have given anything to have been with Runt the night Keegan's cowboys caught up with the little guy.

"That's right, keep pressing them," Father Conley said. "Maybe they don't know it yet, but times are changing. One of these days you're going to knock them out of the box for good." He looked at Matt and said, "I can help you. But I can't do it for you. It takes leadership."

Matt looked down at the sidewalk. He always felt strange in his dark blue suit. He looked over at Fran, talking with some of the other wives. In his mind, Fran and the storage company and the welfare of the kids were all churning around with Runt and what Father Conley was saying and the faces of these dock workers looking at him and waiting for him . . .

The morning after the funeral Matt's alarm clock split the silence at six thirty. Matt swung his legs over the side of the bed. Fran stirred behind him. "I'll get up make you some coffee." She sat up and they looked at each other.

"I'm sorry, Fran, I—"

"Don't be," she said.

Even before what happened to Runt, she had felt it coming. And on the way home from church he had said, "All the fellers liked Runt. There'll be hell to pay. Now's the time to get 'em movin' in the right direction."

Fran, sitting up in bed behind him, said, "Don't get in no more trouble than you can help, Matt."

Matt stood up and stretched, groaned, and reached for his pants. "Don't worry, I'm gonna watch myself, I ain't gonna take no crazy chances like Runt, Lord-'ve-mercy-on-'im."

She wasn't even disappointed about the storage job. A storage man is a storage man, a longshoreman is a longshoreman. In the deepest part of her mind she had known that all along.

"I'll get up make you some coffee," she said again, as she had a thousand times before, as she would — if he was lucky — a thousand times again.

For a moment he roughed her up affectionately. "You're gettin' fat, honey." Then he was pulling his wool checkerboard shirt on over his long underwear. If there was enough work, Fisheye was liable to pick him, just to make it look good in case there was an investigation.

The cargo hook felt good in his belt. He zipped up his windbreaker, told Fran not to worry, set his cap at the old-country angle, and tried not to make too much noise on the creaky stairway as he made his way down through the sleeping tenement.

Flanagan was coming out of his

door as Matt reached the bottom landing. The old docker was yawning and rubbing sleep out of his eyes but he grinned when he saw who it was.

"Matt me lad, we'll be needin' ya, that's for sure."

We. It had taken Flanagan a long time to get his mouth around that *we*. There wasn't any *we* over at the storage company. Matt nodded to Flanagan, a little embarrassed, and fussed with his cap like a pitcher.

"Once a stand-up guy, always a stand-up guy, huh, Matt?"

Matt grunted. He didn't want them to make too much of a deal out of it. Matt felt better when he got outside and the wind came blowing into his face. It felt good — like the cargo hook on his hip, familiar and good.

As they reached the corner, facing the elevated railroad tracks that ran along the river, two figures came up from a basement — Specs Sinclair and young Skelly. Specs had a bad cold. He was a sinus sufferer in the winter-time. He wished he was down in Miami scoring on the horses.

"So you want more?" he said to Matt, daubing his nose with a damp handkerchief. "We run you out of here once but you ain't satisfied. What's a matter, you lookin' to wear cement shoes?"

Matt gazed at him and felt pleased and excited that he was back with this old hoodlum Sinclair and this punk Skelly. They were like old friends in reverse.

"Quit racing your motor," Matt said. "It ain't gonna be so easy this

time. None of us is gonna go wanderin' around alone half gassed like Runt Nolan. We're stickin' together now. And Father Conley's got the newspapers watchin'. You hit me in the head and next thing you know they'll hit you with ten thousand volts."

Specs looked at Skelly. Everything was getting a little out of hand, there was no doubt about it. In the old days you could knock off an old bum like Nolan and that was the end of it. This Matt Gillis, why didn't he stay in

cold storage? For the first time in his life Specs worried whether Lippy Keegan would know the next move.

Matt crossed the street and pushed open the door of the Longdock. Everybody knew he was back. Everybody was going to be watching him. He wished Runt would come over and stick him in the side with a left hand. He knew it wasn't very likely, but it made him feel better to wonder if that scrappy little son-of-a-biscuit-eater was going to be watching too.



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